

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

HAS THE EU'S POSITION TOWARD THE CYPRUS
QUESTION TAKEN A TURN IN THE WAKE OF THE
EASTMED NATURAL GAS DISCOVERIES?

by
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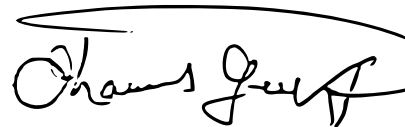
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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Elio Nikolaos Kaponis

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Title: Has the EU's position toward the Cyprus Question taken a turn in the wake of the EastMed natural gas discoveries?

This thesis explores whether the European Union, as an institution and through its member states, has changed its discourse and attitude toward Cyprus in general and the Cyprus Question in particular following the discovery of Natural Gas in the Eastern Mediterranean. In order to do so, a selection of marking events prior to these discoveries have been explored so to get a sense of EU's previous positions. These are the UN sponsored plan to unify the island, Turkey's non-recognition of the Republic of Cyprus, and the economic crisis of 2012. When tackling the Gas discoveries, it is essential to understand what they constitute for EU in general and for its energy security specifically. The thesis then lays out the key events and EU actions and reactions handling the Cyprus issue in its various aspects. The thesis concludes that though the EU has hardened its defensive position in regard to Cypriot EEZ, its position and expression vis-à-vis the Cyprus dispute remains the same. Tactical choices and positions, following actions of other stakeholders in the region, notably Turkey, are what is driving EU policy in regard to Cyprus' dispute for the time being.

ABBREVIATIONS

CEEC	Central and Eastern European Countries
EC	European Commission
EMGF	EastMed Gas Forum
EOKA	National Organizations of Cyprus Fighters
EU	European Union
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
PfP	Partnership for Peace
RoC	Republic of Cyprus
TANAP	Trans Anatolian Pipeline
TAP	Trans Adriatic Pipeline
TPAO	Turkish Petroleum Corporation
TRNC	Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus
UN	United Nations
UNSC	United Nations Security Council

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Eastern Mediterranean constitutes, without any need to romanticize, a premier destination for instability, conflict, and turmoil. Lebanon is on the verge of complete economic collapse, war-torn Syria experiences further complications, Libya is prudently awaiting its next government with no serious hope of reconciliation and Egypt has yet to regain its role in the region. Traditional rivalries and animosities have been reinforced. The Israeli/Palestinian conflict is at a critical point following the wave of normalization accords with Arab states. Finally, the Cypriot/Turkish conflict has been witnessing a series of dramatic events following the gas discoveries.

When the European Union was enlarged in 2004, it stipulated that EU law “shall be suspended in those areas of the Republic of Cyprus in which the Government [...] does not exercise effective control” and that “it shall decide on the withdrawal of the suspension” in due date. Seventeen years later, this suspension is still in place. Cyprus, an EU member state, remains divided and the Northern part awaits its fate. Today however, things have taken a whole new level of complexity in the Eastern Mediterranean. Following the discovery of natural gas, tension in this front has become the new normal. What is more, a multitude of actors have entered in this area, adding to local complexities that have been rooted for decades.

The aim of the thesis is thus a simple yet complex exercise. It wants to analyze the forces and implicit tensions both from within the EU itself and with its foreign relations that have kept the Cyprus dispute resolution at an impasse and try to understand whether or not the current state of affairs in the Eastern Mediterranean has

altered the positions of the Union over that issue. Using discourse and content analysis, in addition to putting things into their context, it will attempt to shed the light on the context in which the EU's position vis-à-vis Cyprus has evolved. That is: regarding the conflict itself, the rights of the Cypriot Republic, the relation with the Greek and Turkish Cypriot communities in the island, and to the guarantor states of Cyprus, notably Turkey.

To my knowledge, no single academic paper has shed the light solely on the centrality and position of the Cyprus issue in internal and external EU policies. This thesis aims at filling the gap. It will aim at serving as a basis in the evaluation of the "Cyprus Effect" on various stops in this process. Moreover, because the EastMed gas discoveries are relatively new, this thesis could serve as an addition to the existing literature on the EU's needs for stability in the region and the way it is adjusting to changes and trying to be a key player in the area.

The thesis wishes to examine the centrality and importance of the Cypriot Republic's case in various notable historical events which have put the EU at the test of credibility and normative performance. I will be selecting some important events that have marked the Cyprus/EU relations: notably the conflict at its genesis, the Annan plan outcome, the refusal of Turkey to recognize Cyprus when implementing the additional protocol and the Cyprus economic crisis of 2012. Moving from this, the thesis will try to make sense of the ongoing tension in the Eastern Mediterranean and whether or not it should bring about hopes for a settlement of a dispute in the Cypriot case because the same actors in Turkey and in Europe have still the same attitudes they have had for a long time now. Worse, Turkey's worsened conditions with many European countries, namely France and Greece, should make us fear that a possible conflict might erupt.

I will begin the thesis with the following hypothesis from a seemingly obvious standpoint: the importance of Cyprus for the EU has dramatically increased following the gas discoveries in the Eastern Mediterranean.

A. Historical Overview

1. The Cyprus Conflict

Cyprus gained its independence from Britain in 1960. Three significant treaties had been established between the newborn state, Greece, Turkey and Great Britain to regulate the state of affairs in the island. These treaties were the result of negotiations between these states and the Greek and Turkish Cypriot representatives, resulting in the “London-Zurich Agreement” of 1959. The first is the Treaty of Establishment, which set up the new Cypriot Republic. The second is the Treaty of Alliance, mainly allowing the dispatch of 950 Greek soldiers and 650 Turkish soldiers in the island (Bölükbaşı, 1998, p.414). The third treaty is the Treaty of Guarantee, which would allow any of the guarantor states to take measures together or alone should they deem this necessary if the status quo on the island is not guaranteed anymore. The goal is to reestablish the state of affairs, after which the guarantor powers are no longer needed (Article 4).

Greek Cypriots had never been fully satisfied by the constitution of the Republic of 1960. Three years later, a revised constitution with 13 amendments was presented by President Makarios. The most significant changes were the abolishment of VETO rights to both Greek Cypriot President and Turkish Cypriot Vice President, this was an important leverage for the minority representing only 20% of the island’s population. (Ker-Lindsay, 2011, p.320). Many Turkish Cypriots took the streets to protest these changes and internal fights between the two communities began in December 1963

(Polivou, 1980, p.32). Rapidly, armed confrontations spread across the whole island and ethnic cleansing had begun. Parallel to these events, Turkish Cypriots decided to cease their participation in the Republic's institutions and establish their own parallel institutions (Kalyvas, 2015).

Many Greek Cypriots of a newly formed military organization called EOKA-B, whose sole goal was to unite with Greece and put an end to the Makarios regime. When its Cypriot leader Grivas died, it came under the control of the Greek military Junta. On July 15, 1974, the epitome of EOKA-B's masterplan unveiled itself, with members of the National Guard (members of EOKA- B as well) shooting at the presidential palace in Nicosia. Makarios managed to escape the palace and an EOKA (predecessor of EOKA-B) gunman, Nicos Sampson, took control of the Cypriot administration (Kalyvas, 2015) Makarios survived and managed to escape Cyprus. This had followed the demand of the Cypriot president to his Greek counterpart to remove the Greek forces from the island on July 2, which had remained unanswered (Constantinides, 2014, p.37).

Turkey had begun planning for an invasion which concretized early morning of July 20. Strategic places in the capital Nicosia and the Kyrenia mountains were bombed by Turkish jets and hours later Turkish soldiers sailed to the Northern shores of the island (Ker, 2011, p.83). The Turkish invasion prompted the failure of the coup and resulted in the collapse of the military regime in Greece (Kalyvas, 2015). On August 14, 1974, the Turkish Army violently seized control of more territories in the Northern part of the island, further displacing tens of thousands of Greek Cypriots, effectively controlling the Northern part of Cyprus and occupying 36% of the total area. (Ker-

Lindsay, 2006, p.411). Turkey had further invaded the island as a way to make political gains in discussions (Ercan, 2017, p.434).



Figure 1 Political Map of Cyprus (Al Jazeera Website, 2017)

On November 15, 1983, Turkish Cypriot leader Rauf Denktas announced the establishment of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC). Turkey was surprised by the decision of Denktash to establish the new republic (Ker Lindsay, 2006, p.439). Moreover, Turkmen told the Greek Ambassador to Ankara that they could not “control” Denktash’s decisions regardless of their attempts). The Turkish National Security Council convened however, and Turkmen announced Turkey had decided to recognize the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (Ker Lindsay, 2006, p.441). The UNSC issued resolution 541. It considered the declaration of the “Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus” as invalid in paragraph 2, called states to respect the “sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity and non-alignment of the Republic of Cyprus” in paragraph 6, and called all countries not to recognize any Cypriot state other than the Republic of Cyprus, while reaffirming the two communities’ presence on the island. (UNSC, 1983).

In 2004, the UN Secretary General Kofi Annan presented his plan to reunify the island on the basis of a bi-communal, bi-zonal federation. The plan was widely accepted by the Turkish Cypriot Community but rejected by the Greek Cypriots. In May 2004, Cyprus joined the EU as a divided country. Efforts to reunify the island since then have been unsuccessful. The next round of talks is expected to take place in April 2021.

2. Natural Gas Discoveries in Cyprus

Although Cyprus' prospects of becoming a natural gas exporter, the country's energy mix is completely devoid from gas. In fact, oil makes up the overwhelming source of energy of the Republic, followed by biofuels and waste, renewable energy sources; and coal which has been reintroduced in 2017 (IEA Website).

The Republic of Cyprus has so far held three licensing rounds for offshore hydrocarbon explorations. The first one was held in October 2007 and resulted in October of the year later in the award of block 12, located on the Eastern side of the island to American Noble Energy. The company's efforts in the block permitted it to discover what is called the "Aphrodite" field in December 2011. Aphrodite contains around 0.129 tcm of natural gas.

The second licensing round was held in 2012. The result of it was the award of five blocks to Italian, French and Korean companies. The Eni-Kogas consortium that was given block 9 came out with negative results in December 2014 as no traces of natural gas were found. Another well was drilled in the same block and although some gas was found, it was not a quantity that is commercially viable. In 2015, Total announced it was no longer interested in investing in block 10 which had been awarded to it. That same year, Italian Eni decided to halt its explorations in blocks 2 and 3 in

order to review its assessment model (Tsakiris, 2018: 34). In 2015 also, Nobel Energy, Israeli Delek and Avner Oil Exploration filed a joint Declaration of Commerciality and a development and production plan. That same year, Nobel Energy sold 35% of block 12 in which the Aphrodite field is located, to British Gas.

The third licensing round was held in 2016, following rising optimism on the RoC's side due to the discovery of the Zohr field in Egypt, which is to date the largest discovery in the Eastern Mediterranean region. This occurred because the field is too close of block 11 at just 6 kilometers away. In 2017, three licensing awards were given.

The Eni/Total consortium was awarded block 6. The Italian Eni company was awarded block 8. ExxonMobil and Qatar petroleum were granted the rights to invest in block 10 through a consortium agreement. The Eni/Total consortium was able to find a gas field "Kalypso" in block 6, expected to extend further onto block 7. In July 2019, the Greek Cypriot government announced that a license exploration was granted to the consortium for exploration in block 7, and the contracts were signed in September 2019 (LGN, 2019). In November 2019, Noble, Delek and Shell signed a 25-year agreement with Cyprus to exploit the field. A final investment decision should occur in 2022. Moreover, another agreement between Egypt's Idku operators and the companies investing in Cypriot EEZ is in preparation.

B. Literature Review

The selection of literature was made on a thematic segregation, then on a chronological one. For the purposes of the thesis, theoretical pieces have been dismissed. On the history of the Cyprus question, various books have been written underlying different aspects of the ongoing conflict and the role of various actors. Ker-

Lindsay's 2011 book *"The Cyprus Problem: What Everyone Needs to Know"* has become a well-established go-to source because of the in-depth analysis he has provided throughout his career.

Like all issues related to the Cypriot conflict, it appears that the issue of the role of the EU in solving the Cyprus question has created discord in the academic world between supporters of its role and staunch critics. Many books and articles were written on the state of affairs in Cyprus both before and after it had joined the EU. Some have approached it from a legal perspective. Isikal argues that it was an EU mistake to let Cyprus in since the island was not united, and that EU was thus taking sides in the conflict. Other authors have argued that the EU should do more to defend its territory against Turkish aggression (Melakopides, 2009).

The large selection of literature covering the EU-Cyprus relations stresses the underlying complexities and mistrust among Cypriots in regard to the Union. On the attempts to find a solution to the Cyprus issue both before and after it had become a member of the EU, Kyris (2014) signals Turkish Cypriots fears of the EU's role in Cyprus and Greek influence, leading to them adopting stronger Turkish nationalistic views prior to Cypriot accession to the bloc. His main argument is the failure of the EU to overcome internal differences in Cyprus and to understand the needs of both communities. The growing frustration of the Turkish Cypriot community and the lifting of conditionality to access the EU for the RoC are two such examples. Katsourides (2014) talks about the Cypriot Economic Crisis and the aggravated situation the Cypriots found themselves in, often citing EU as a source of their problems. Casaglia (2018) echoes the same perception found in Greek Cyprus in the Turkish part of the island, which was not spared the economic downturn.

For the ongoing dispute on oil and gas and the geopolitical interest of the Eastern Mediterranean for the EU, a limited but growing number of academic articles have emerged in the recent years. Martin Beck argues that there are security concerns in the Southern Mediterranean that cannot be neglected for the EU and that had resurfaced in the 2010s (2019). Mavroyiannis (2014) argues that Cyprus' geostrategic importance for the EU rests on its predictability, reliability and stability. These authors seem therefore inclined to argue that the EU's interest in the Eastmed can in no way be linked to the gas discoveries alone, signaling a continuity in both interest and positions.

On the Cypriot role in the Eastmed, several authors have pinpointed the growing strategic alliances that have been emerging. Mitchell (2020) argues that the Eastmed Gas Forum represents the outpost of a process that had been taking years to reach between Cyprus, Greece, Israel and Egypt. The EU has expressed particular interest in this forum and has provided it with financial and moral support. Many authors have put forward the strategic alliance between Cyprus, Greece and Israel on one hand, and that of the two Hellenic Republics and Egypt on the other as critical for the growing role and interest that have been attributed to them (Karbuz, 2018; Kontos and Bitsis, 2018; Pope, 2014).

As for Cyprus' role in the expansion of the energy security of the EU, Tirillos argues that Cyprus can provide new corridors than the existing ones emanating mainly from Russia, with the Eastern Mediterranean providing that "fifth corridor" (2017). The existing literature emphasizes a lot on the need of the EU for Russian gas (Henderson and Sharples, 2018; Tsakiris, 2019). Resorting to an expansion of sources is, according to them, a necessity to limit Russia's influence. The principle of "economic peace" as a strategy undertaken by the EU is mentioned by Marketos (2018). ElBassoussy (2018)

argues that the EU would like to promote cooperation in the area. According to him, the need of the EU in the Eastmed is also linked to the heavy presence of European companies in the exploration and drilling activities, and the physical presence of three European nations in the area.

C. Methodology

Departing from the existing literature, I will attempt to shed the light on what has been the position of the EU in particularly interesting times for EU/Cyprus relations. Three examples in particular are of interest prior to the gas discoveries: the Annan Plan's aftermath, the refusal of Turkey to recognize the Republic of Cyprus and the economic crisis of 2012. These will hopefully allow the readers to further grasp the state of affairs between the EU and Cyprus following the accession of the latter.

The bulk of the research has been done for the EU/Cyprus relations dynamics following the gas discoveries. The main tool for the research was a collection of newspaper and other media articles, press releases, brief minutes, motion resolutions, draft resolutions and reports. Studies conducted for EU agencies on the necessity of the EastMed gas discoveries, ways to bolster cooperation and the role of individual states (notably Cyprus) had been given thorough attention.

CHAPTER II

THE EU AND THE CYPRUS QUESTION: A FAILED SYNERGIST FOR PEACE?

A. European positions following the Conflict

The Turkish Cypriot side was resolute that the Greek Cypriots unilaterally breached the constitution and led to the collapse of order in the island. They also expressed discontent at the United Nations, the European Community and the Council of Europe for their position of legitimizing the Greek Cypriot government as the sole representative of the Republic of Cyprus (Bhutta, 2013). Rauf Denktaş, the Turkish Cypriot leader, announced that until this wrong was reversed, the solution to the Cyprus issue will remain far from reach (Hannay, 2005).

The EU's first blow to the Turkish Cypriots and their administration was the decision in 1992 by the European Court of Justice to impose an embargo on products and exports that are of Turkish Cypriot origin (Case C-432/92). This led to a large wound in the Turkish Cypriot economy and pushed for euro-skepticism within the community (Kyris, 2014: 92). What is worse, the EU emphasized a lot on their economic benefits to the Turkish Cypriot community and downplayed on their security concerns (Ertekun, 1999: 108). The worsened situation between Greece and Turkey further played a negative perception of the EU to Turkish Cypriots, as issues like the demarcation of the exclusive economic zones (EEZ) in the Aegean in addition to territorial, air and water disputes had become more relevant (Bhutta, 2013). During the eighties, Greece had undergone a modernization of its armed forces that put Turkey at higher risks of alarm (ibid). Because Greece was a member state of the EU and not

Turkey, the Turkish Cypriot security fears within the EU grew stronger, so did a Turkish nationalist perception (Kyriss, 2014: 92).

The European Union received the application of the Republic of Cyprus on July 4, 1990. Much to the frustration of the Turkish Cypriot side, they claimed that this unilateral application to join the EU cannot be pursued because the foundations of the RoC were of two equal political entities that hold veto rights together (communiqué, 2010). The TRNC further added that “[m]embership of the European Communities is unworkable in a divided island’ (North Cyprus, 2010 - from Kyriss, 2014: 89).

In 1994, it was declared in the European Council on Corfu that Cyprus would take part of the next Enlargement round. This has primarily been the case because of successful Greek diplomacy in promoting Cyprus’ nomination and accession within the EU (Brewin, 1999: 51). In fact, Greece was holding European Council at that time, it threatened to block the advancement of CEEC enlargement round if Cyprus’ case was not brought forward (Martin, 2014: chapter 2). Cyprus was a trade-off between Greece and the rest of the EU, when it agreed not to block through its veto rights a customs union with Turkey provided Cyprus would become a candidate as soon as possible (ibid).

Moreover, Cyprus made tremendous advances in meeting the 1993 Copenhagen Criteria to become a member of the Union under its strict conditions (Nugent, 1997: 72). Finally, the hardline positions the Turkish Cypriot administration had taken in regard to the accession to the EU led many milieux to fear that Greek Cypriots would then be caught hostages in this situation (Kyriss, 2014: 89).

In the Helsinki meeting of 1999, it was announced that Cypriot unification shall no longer be a pre-condition for the effective membership of the Republic of Cyprus to

the EU (Bhutta, 2013). The presidency Conclusions of the Helsinki European Council stated that “[t]he European Council underlines that a political settlement will facilitate the accession of Cyprus to the European Union. If no settlement has been reached by the completion of accession negotiations, the Council’s decision on accession will be made without the above being a precondition.” (1999: point 9(b))

The EU started negotiations to accession with Cyprus in 1998 and signed the Treaty of Accession on April 16, 2003 (Bhutta, 2013). Following the declaration that the pre-condition had been lifted, the Greek Cypriots were now facing less pressure to solve the issue, and they began taking more forceful stances on the disputer (ibid).

According to Bhutta, the Cyprus issue is the biggest obstacle for the acceptance of Turkey within the EU community (2013). The accession of Turkey cannot occur without the unanimous vote of all member states of the EU. Cyprus has a veto power that would place it in a position of constant vantage vis-a-vis Turkey.

The official opening of the EU accession for Cyprus in 1998 would however become a turning point for Turkish Cypriot views in regard to the EU. In addition to this, the coming to power of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) in Turkey in December 2002 signaled a shift in traditional Turkish policy vis-a-vis Cyprus. The new winners underlined a more flexible approach to the Cypriot conflict and ways to find solutions to it (The Independent, 3 January 2003). That being said, the new party had to deal with a series of tests at its arrival. First were domestic issues linked to the Kemalists in the state apparatus. More importantly, in foreign policy, was the looming decision of the United States to invade Iraq and the demand to use Turkey’s airspace and bases for the military operations of the alliance consisting of the UK and USA (Martin, 2014: chapter 4). This meant that the US’ support for Turkey EU accession

was put aside and Turkey lost significant US support. The Iraq issue distracted Turkey from Cyprus and Turkey had to come to back the Annan Plan under UK and EU pressure in general (ibid).

Thus, the Turkish Government persuaded Denktash to move along with the Annan Plan in order to pursue with Turkish accession within the EU. It had been persuaded by both the EU and the US and UK separately to put pressure on Northern Nicosia in this direction. And the AKP responded to these demands. In 2003, the UK ambassador to Ankara had stated: “Finding a solution to the Cyprus question would considerably affect the decision to be made by the EU member countries, which will review Turkey’s application for membership. The need to resolve that problem is stressed in the accession partnership document [...]” (Westmacott, 2009 - from Martin, 2014: chapter 4)

B. The Annan Plan’s rejection by the Greek Cypriot Side

Following the rejection of the Annan Plan by the Greek Cypriots, the TRNC leader accused Turkey of putting its interest of joining the EU ahead of that of the TRNC and its people. Erdogan quickly accused the Greek Cypriots of having “destroyed an initiative full of good will” and that the morality presented by the Turkish Government and Cypriot Turkish people was unmet. That has put the EU in a sticky situation. Indeed, Turkey was receptive of the demands brought about prior to the referendum and now they had a debt to repay. The European Commission would therefore give a positive recommendation in the 2004 progress report on Turkey, an ultimate key for negotiation talks to begin (Martin, chapter 4).

In what clearly translates the embarrassment the EU found itself in, many EU representatives and states' foreign ministries issued statements and comments, regretting the outcome in Greek Cyprus while warmly welcoming the Turkish Cypriot vote. To some extent, many European member states had seemed irritated by the democratic process that had taken place because of the unsatisfactory results, overcoming the causes in many instances.

The president of the European parliament then, Pat Cox, stated on April 24, 2004:

“I deeply regret the outcome of the referendum among the Greek Cypriot community in Cyprus [...]. The enlargement of the European Union on 1 May offers a dramatic change of context [...]. At the same time, I warmly welcome the strong endorsement of the Annan Plan by Turkish Cypriots” (Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs Website).

The European Commission issued a press release that same day: “[It] deeply regrets that the Greek Cypriot community did not approve the comprehensive settlement of the Cyprus problem. A unique opportunity [...] has been missed. [It] would like to warmly congratulate Turkish Cypriots for their "Yes" vote. This signals a clear desire of the community to resolve the island's problem. The Commission is ready to consider ways of further promoting economic development of the northern part of Cyprus” (ibid).

The Secretary General of the Council of Europe issued a statement on April 25, highlighting that “the referendum in the northern part of the island has at least achieved the ending of the moral isolation of the Turkish Cypriots.” EU enlargement commissioner Verheugen told a television network that the next step that “we will

seriously consider now is finding a way to end the economic isolation of the Turkish Cypriots” (ibid).

Unsurprisingly, the British Foreign Minister Jack Straw stated he was “saddened by the decision of a majority of Greek Cypriot voters to reject the settlement, despite the prospect it offered of reuniting the island” and that he was “glad that the Turkish Cypriot community has voted so clearly for the settlement.” British Prime Minister Tony Blair took it further during a visit to Turkey on May 17, 2004:

“We must now act to end the isolation of Northern Cyprus[...] It means lifting sanctions on trade and travel. It also means ensuring that EU funds currently available for dispersal are actually dispersed.” in a clear denunciation of the funds for Cyprus that many argue go exclusively in the hands of Greek Cypriots. The anger and resentment of the UK toward Greek Cypriots was echoed by many UK diplomats and officials. The former Representative to Cyprus Lord Hannay wanted to teach Greek Cypriots a lesson they could not forget: “What should happen now? In my view, it is important that the Greek Cypriots be left in no doubt of the real anger and disappointment throughout the international community at their decision. The Greek Cypriots have chosen to reject the views of the UN and of their new partners in the European Union. They can expect no support for their case and should get none [...]” (Turkish MOFA website).

France was much more discreet and diplomatic in its criticism of the Greek Cypriot rejection. The Foreign Ministry issued a statement on April 25: "France notes the results of the referenda in Cyprus which ended in the rejection of the Annan Plan for the island's reunification by one of the parties. It regrets that this result will not allow the accession of a reunited Cyprus [...]. Cyprus' accession to the EU, on May 1, will not assume its full significance until such time that the two communities are reconciled. [It]

hopes that the Commission [...] proposes that proper measures be taken to promote the economic development of the northern part of the island and bring it closer to the Union” (Turkish MOFA website).

Germany was similar in its approach of the Greek Cypriot rejection: “The German Government regrets that a "yes" vote was achieved only in the northern part of the island in today's referenda in Cyprus. It is disappointing that the citizens in the south of the island did not seize the great opportunity for reunification which the Annan Plan offered. Unfortunately, a reunited Cyprus will not now be joining the European Union on 1 May" (ibid).

Sweden’s foreign ministry lent a hand to Turkey in its statement: “Both peoples of the island have a certain place in the Union. We appreciate the initiative of Prime Minister Erdoğan and of the Turkish Government in order to re-unite Cyprus. Now, the EU must evaluate how it can contribute and facilitate the trade in the island and the border crossings between the two parts” (ibid).

Austria, a staunch opponent to Turkey becoming a member of the EU, and whose relations with Turkey are quite tense, issued a press statement that would potentially disregard the issue of Cyprus as a strong element for its positions toward Turkey. Indeed, the Foreign Minister Ferrero-Waldner “expressed her regret at the negative outcome of the referendum on the Greek side of Cyprus. The fact that the referendum resulted in a positive vote on the Turkish side of Cyprus should be appropriately honored by the international community," Ferrero-Waldner stated” (ibid).

Surprisingly, the Netherland’s State Secretary, also chargé of EU affairs, issued a press statement condemning Greece’s influence. “According to him also the Greek authorities are to blame as a result of the one-sided portrayal of matters, as a result of

which those in favor of a reunion did not stand much of a chance in the referendum of Saturday” (ibid). Thus, in the spectrum of the EU, aside from Greece, the Greek Cypriot side was almost condemned for the results of the referendum.

Many EU academics and scholars have shifted their position from accepting the Annan Plan in the Cyprus dispute to readjusting their position against it and in favor of the Greek Cypriot rejection. This of course did not mean that the EU member states had decided to repay the Turkish Cypriots by accepting the TRNC as a state, nor to lift the trade embargo on them. However, it does show the extent of the relevance of the Greek Cypriot cause, the sole representative of the Republic of Cyprus, which would later be an EU member state, to them. In fact, the apologetic tone that most member states have expressed, even those who have the most difficult and tense relationship with Turkey, indicates a near absence of interest in the cause that the RoC holds close to its heart. Any expectation of sacrifice from the Greek Cypriots signals a lack of understanding of the interests defended by them. It can be clearly said therefore, that until the accession of the Republic of Cyprus into the EU, the EU did not hold a normative stance in defense of the Republic of Cyprus, since it was ready to accommodate a plan that Greek Cypriots, in an outright majority, refused. Moreover, the need to “compensate” for the damage caused to Turkey by granting it a positive evaluation in the 2004 progress report also shows how pragmatic and realist the EU tends to become, even when one of its own is at war.

According to Claire Palley, “The Secretariat sought to mislead the international community through the Secretary-General's Reports and briefings it prepared, so as to pressure a small state effectively to accept the consequences of aggression by a large neighbouring state allied to two permanent members of the Security Council.” (Palley,

2005). Moreover, French MEP Dominique Souchet wondered “How could the European Parliament endorse a proposed settlement which denies refugees the right to recover the property taken from them, which constitutes a permanent restriction on people’s freedom of movement and establishment, which perpetuates the presence of occupying troops and which does not provide any recourse against violations of human rights before the Strasbourg Court?” (European Parliament, 2004).

Those European States that noted that the Greek Cypriot vote outcome was a disappointment, most notably the UK’s harsh positions vis-a-vis the Greek Cypriot community, have failed to grasp that this was a democratic process. To highlight this vulgar breach of an EU principle, Lord Hannay stated that "If the Greek-Cypriots say 'no' to the Annan plan, we will take them to a new referendum, until they say yes." In terms of EU country denouncing the Greek Cypriot vote, Souchet reminded that “the rule of democracy means that the decision of the people must be respected, especially if expressed in the most undeniable way in this respect: a referendum." (European Parliament, 2004).

C. Cyprus as an EU member state: Change in discourse?

1. Case Study 1: Turkey refuses to recognize Cyprus under the additional protocol

When the accession negotiations were opened in 2005, it was primarily due to the UK’s incessant efforts since 2002 to make Turkey a member of the Union. This culminated with the UK’s presidency of the EU, and ultimately allowed it to take the decision to begin negotiations (Martin, 2014: 199). Cyprus, now a member of the EU, had already begun influencing the process. Nicolas Sarkozy and Angela Merkel were

also more vocal against this accession negotiation door opening, which irritated both the AKP and the nationalists in Turkey (FT, 2005).

Martin argues that EU's normative identity and approach was developed after Turkey's eligibility to become a candidate (ibid: 356). Turkey underwent a significant amount of reforms and changes by adopting eight harmonization packages, ultimately rendering its candidacy inevitable (Ustun, 2018: 28). But although it did later introduce further changes like the 2010 constitutional amendments on individual liberties, it had failed to understand the growing importance of normative EU stances (Oğuzlu, 2012:231).

It was not the UK, but rather the United States that finally persuaded the Cypriots into accepting the opening of negotiations with Turkey, namely Condoleezza Rice (FT, 2005). Turkey was fully aware of Cyprus' attempts to scupper the negotiations with Turkey. France became more hostile to the accession under Sarkozy, and Merkel began the policy of a "privileged partnership" instead of a full membership (Martin, 2014: 201).

Cyprus and Austria were the two most opposed to the negotiations opening with Turkey and attempted several times to block Turkey in 2004 and 2005 prior to the accession talks declaration. They were met by the skillful UK diplomacy that was able to tactically and strategically render null these attempts with the portfolio it had helped create for Turkey in terms of track record of reforms (Martin, 2014: 202).

What becomes clear later on is that the presence of the Republic of Cyprus within the European Union was a definite dealbreaker for Turkey when it comes to the Cyprus issue. In this regard, Cyprus was most aided by Austria, which took over the EU presidency in January 2006 and put it at the forefront of the EU/Turkey relation by

making an ultimatum to Turkey to recognize the Republic of Cyprus within the framework of the European Union (AFP, 2006). When in January 2006, Turkey had offered to lift the ban on ports and airports for RoC vessels in return of a broader recognition of the TRNC, the UK foreign secretary Jack Straw attempted to lure Cyprus into this offer. Nicosia categorically refused that Turkey recognizes the Additional Protocol for the recognition of the TRNC.

Cyprus attempted to block the opening of the first Chapter on the accession talks regarding the *acquis communautaire* in June 2006. These efforts failed and Nicosia found itself accepting a compromise at the European Council, which consisted of the Council to issue a warning for Turkey on the necessity of “implement[ing] its obligations in full” or else that “will affect the overall progress in the negotiations” (from Martin, 2004: 203). PM Erdogan was quick to answer, “We will never take a step backwards, not in the ports or the airports, without the isolation being lifted.” (FT, 2006)

On July 29, 2005, Turkey signed the additional protocol to the Customs Union with the EU, extending it to cover the ten newcomers to the EU, including the Republic of Cyprus. It had been signed by the EU President from the United Kingdom and sent to the ambassador of Turkey to the EU. Turkey released a statement in parallel to the protocol, stating that “The signature, ratification and implementation of this Protocol neither amount to any form of recognition of the Republic of Cyprus referred to in the Protocol.” (Declaration of Turkey on Cyprus, 2005: para. 4). It also called the Republic of Cyprus “Greek Cypriot authorities” (para. 3) and reaffirmed its recognition and relation with the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (para.5). Thus, Turkey refused to recognize the Cypriot Republic, in a clear contradiction to its aspirations to become a

member state of a union in which the state it does not recognize is a member. According to Melakopides, “it seems prima facie absurd to deny recognition of a member state of the very organisation you aspire to join, and to pose as oblivious to the entailed political risks. (2009: 200).

On October 14, 2005, the Council of the EU published a draft reply to Belgian Member of the European Parliament Philip Claey's who had sent an inquiry on August 23rd entitled “Non-recognition of Cyprus by Turkey”. Claey's first denounced the inaction of the British Presidency to the statement made by Turkey in this regard. He then asked why Turkey was not forced to recognize all member states of the EU prior to opening accession talks. He finally asked about the technicalities regarding Turkey opening its air and seaports to Cypriot vessels and whether or not that would be done immediately given that Turkish FM reiterated that this would not happen. (EU Doc, 2005).

It took the European Union two months to issue a “counter-declaration” on September 21, 2005. According to Melakopides, it was a commitment for the EU to reaffirm its essential values and principles (2009:201). This counter-declaration was the result of intense debate and discussion and was the result of 7 draft declarations that led to the final adoption. The European Council froze eight out of 35 acquis chapters in the Turkey accession process (Bhutta, 2013).

In article 1, the EU signaled its “regret that Turkey felt it necessary to make a declaration regarding the Republic of Cyprus at the time of signature.” In article 2, the EU wanted to “make clear that this declaration by Turkey is unilateral, does not form part of the Protocol and has no legal effect on Turkey’s obligations under the Protocol.” In article 3, the community reminded that “Turkey must apply the Protocol fully to all

EU Member States. The EU will monitor this closely and evaluate full implementation in 2006. The European Community and its Member States stress that the opening of negotiations on the relevant chapters depends on Turkey's implementation of its contractual obligations to all Member States. Failure to implement its obligations in full will affect the overall progress in the negotiations." Article 5 stressed that "Recognition of all Member States is a necessary component of the accession process. Accordingly, the EU underlines the importance it attaches to the normalisation of relations between Turkey and all EU Member States, as soon as possible."

At any rate, the reply of the Council of the EU to the Belgian MEP reiterated the counter-declaration almost exclusively, ending with this remark also taken from the counter-declaration: "it is evident that the Union expects Turkey apply the additional protocol fully and in a non-discriminatory manner to all EU Member States" and that "progress on [the issues] will be closely followed". (EU Doc, 2005). On October 5, 2006 Merkel visited Turkey for the first time as a chancellor and reiterated the call for Turkey to meet its obligations in order to move on with the membership talks (DW, 2006).

The European Union stressed in the counter-declaration that the settlement of the Cyprus dispute should now rest "in line with the principles on which the Union is founded" (para 7). This call would be reiterated in the "Negotiating Framework for Turkey" of October 2005. Turkey's "continued support for efforts to achieve a comprehensive settlement of the Cyprus problem within the UN framework and in line with the principles on which the Union is founded [...]" was evoked. Moreover, the Framework called upon Turkey to achieve "progress in the normalisation of bilateral relations [with] all EU Member States". The *Proposal for a Council Decision on the*

Principles, Priorities, and Conditions contained in the Accession Partnership with Turkey reiterated that same call for the candidate state. During this period, the Commission aligned the settlement of the Cypriot dispute with the norms and principles that were the foundation of the European Union.

The EU then seemed divided on the first test that was brought to it by the Turkish Government. Abdullah Gul, Turkey's foreign Minister told the Finnish EU Presidency that his country would be willing to open one port provisionally for one year for Cypriot vessels. He also stated that he would also open one airport for Cypriot commercial fleet but that his country expected that a port and airport in Northern Cyprus be also open for international trade and tourism (Reuters, 2006). This proposal came at a time when EU ambassadors were meeting in Brussels to discuss sanctions on Ankara following its dismissal of the deadline set to meet its Ankara Agreement Additional Protocol (ibid).

The EU seemed divided on how to handle the Turkish offer and different countries sent different messages on how the EU should react. On one hand, the Cypriot Foreign Minister Liliakas declared that “[i]t’s a premeditated attempt to impress, and it’s a mockery of the European Union. It is devoid of any serious content.” Moreover, Austrian Foreign Minister echoed her Cypriot counterpart by declaring that the EU/Turkey talks should be halted until 2008. On the other hand, European Enlargement Commissioner Olli Rehn from Finland expressed to Finnish Television “If Turkey’s suggestion of opening one port has been made unconditionally, it is a very important step toward Turkey implementing the Ankara Protocol (to the customs union).” The UK was most vocal and welcoming of the Turkish offer and a senior British official called this offer as “really significant” and that the EU should respond to it (ibid).

Martin stresses the rift between the normative values of the EU and Turkey’s

performance. She argues that an illiberal turn of Turkey that had taken place since 2007 means that Turkey under the “Erdogan Effect” will continue to be confrontational with the EU (Martin, 2014: Chapter 7).

2. Case Study 2: The Cyprus Economic Crisis of 2012

One big blow to Cypriots’ hope of the possibility of the EU to be a problem solver and turned its image into a source of uncertainty of the future is the hard and severe economic crisis that hit the country in 2012-2013. Like its fellow European member state Greece, Cyprus was faced with austerity measures that were tough on its citizens. On March 15, 2013, the Eurogroup reached a 10 billion euros deal with the Republic of Cyprus, essentially meaning tight austerity measures and a bank levy on deposits in Cypriot banks. The public outcry and mass demonstrations outside the House of Representatives led the deal to be finally rejected. Ten days later a new plan was announced, where Cyprus’ second largest bank, Laiki Bank, was liquidated and its deposits were moved to Bank of Cyprus (the largest). Instead of a bail-out, the agreement was transformed into a bail-in (Katsourides, 2014: 655). One of Cyprus’ main political parties (AKEL) suggested that same year a proposal for exiting the Eurozone. What is more, an added layer of dismay for opening the island for open competition and flow of EU nationals to work on the island had added insult to injury.

In terms of pressure from within the EU on the levy on deposits, Stacey notes that “[t]he Germans [...] were complicit [...] [but not] alone in pressuring the Cypriots. The Dutch, Finns and Austrians were equally adamant, as were the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund [...]” (Der Spiegel, 2013). Cyprus, at its lowest point, was like its neighbor Greece. With citizens “shouting anti-German

epithets and burning the European Union flag” (NYTimes, 2013). According to an MP interviewed by the New York Times, “there [was] a real lack of European solidarity” (ibid).

In both Greek and Turkish sides of the island the growing irritation of the EU was obvious. The EU had become a distant tool that does not understand the circumstances of citizens on the island, its policies were out of sync with social and economic realities in the island that were aggravated following the economic crisis (Katsourides, 2014: 655). For Greek Cypriots, this was a reminder of the EU’s disappointing position and contribution to the Cyprus problem in 2004. The politicization of the EU meant that further disappointed on EU’s contribution was to be expected. For Turkish Cypriots, the isolation of their part of the island was an added level of frustration amid the harsh economic crisis that for obvious reasons did not spare them. There again, the role of the EU seemed to be that of a distant entity not caring for the people: “What you’ve seen happening in Cyprus, with the crisis, and in Greece before [...] you see the EU has done nothing, and for Turkish Cypriots it has done even less than that. (A.Z., Turkish Cypriot citizen – interviewed in 2013; from Casaglia, 2018)”

Von Jeffrey Stacey wrote in *Der Spiegel* about the bailout program that “the EU made major mistakes in the bailout of Cyprus, to the point that it almost failed completely. Even worse, the whole affair demonstrates a distinct inability to act strategically when the stakes are high.” According to him, not only did the EU hamper Cyprus’ national economy, but it had also pushed a setback to its strategic interests too. He added that what was portrayed as technical and economic at heart was actually a political move. Contrary to popular belief that it was the popular stress caused by the

Northern economies to step in and bail out a poorer Southern country, it was actually a political reaction to Greece's successful blackmail that had forced EU member states to welcome Cyprus for it not to VETO the candidacy of Scandinavian countries. "The EU was so bent on putting its boot on the Cypriot neck that it neglected to think through the acute danger of setting off bank runs around the region by violating its own banking deposit guarantee." (Der Spiegel, 2013).

In terms of finding a settlement to the Cyprus dispute, Stacey noted that the European's "abject error" in the deal reached with Cyprus meant that "a peace deal along the lines of the Annan Plan for a final resolution of the 40-year-old Cypriot divide -- the prospects for which had improved with the election of Anastasiades -- has seen its prospects diminished." (ibid). It becomes clear that the years ensuing the crisis represented a low point for Cyprus/EU relations. The European Union was simply no longer seen by the large portion of the Cypriot population as a trusted partner. Even two years after the deal, in 2015, the resentment Cypriots had toward the EU was still evident. Christos Phokas, a Cypriot banker, said to the NYTimes that "Instead of [the EU] helping us, they acted like they didn't know us." John Hourican, who was put in the board of the Bank of Cyprus, stated that what happened to Cyprus was unacceptable by all means. The Cyprus deal was exceptional and "[i]n every other country in the European Union without exception this has not been allowed to occur" (NYTimes, 2015).

The Cyprus economic problem that kept Cypriots and Europeans busy for almost three consecutive years sidelined the preoccupations of either party on putting forward the Cyprus question. Cyprus was once again a burden for the Europeans, not an advantage. On the other hand, the EU became synonym of mistrust to the Cypriots.

What is worse, the outcome of the crisis revealed once again that application on the ground and normative values of the EU are quite contrasted.

This chapter focused on European stances in three critical events of Cyprus' history as an EU member state. They reveal that for the EU, much of the Cypriot issues were dealt with lack of real understanding of contextual and historical fears and aspirations of both constituents. The next chapter explores a gamechanger, blessing and curse for Cyprus and the broader region, the Eastmed Gas discoveries.

CHAPTER III

THE EASTMED AND CYPRUS WATERS: A HOTSPOT FOR TENSION

A. Obstacles facing Cyprus in its EEZ

1. Turkey's meddling in Cypriot EEZ

The 2017 Constitutional Referendum in Turkey brought about significant damage between Turkey and other EU member states. The most notable example was the attempt of the Turkish PM to attend a rally in the Netherlands and was refused entry to the country (Ustun, 2018: 58). The diplomatic row between the two countries led Turkey to make hard positions regarding the EU in general and more notably the Netherlands, Germany, and Austria.

There are four main challenges facing the Republic of Cyprus when it comes to how it must handle Turkey. The first is the non-recognition of Turkey to the Republic of Cyprus, although many argue that this is in fact not true since it had recognized it at its independence. Some argue that the non-recognition of the successive governments does not mean that Turkey does not recognize the Republic. Second, and more logically speaking, Turkey does not believe that the government of the RoC represents the whole Cypriot population (i.e., the Turkish Cypriots), which is true. Thirdly, it denounces the unilateral exploration and drilling activities which it deems to be an important obstacle to negotiation talks on reunification. This is why it has been calling for a settlement of the Cyprus question prior to any exploration activity around the island.

In September 2011, Noble Energy, the Houston-based energy company began drilling off Cypriot waters under the full authorization of the Republic of Cyprus and was able to find a field of gas of moderate size (Aphrodite) that led to a very negative

reaction by Turkey which threatened to use force (Bitsis and Kontos, 2018: 55).

Turkey's Minister for European affairs was quoted saying for local newspaper Today's Zaman "This is what we have the navy for. We have trained our marines for this; we have equipped the navy for this. All options are on the table; anything can be done." (As quoted in ERPIC, 2011:1).

The European Union did not face Turkey's threats too seriously. On September 19, 2011, the spokeswoman for EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton was quoted saying "We urge Turkey to refrain from any kind of threat or sources of friction or action which could negatively affect the good neighborly relations and the peaceful settlement of border disputes" (GreekReporter, 2011).

There have been three illegal drilling activities by Turkey in the EEZ of the Republic of Cyprus to date. In February 2013, the Turkish Petroleum Corporation purchased a 3D seismic vessel which was then relabeled "RV *Barbaros Hayreddin Paşa*" (Barbaros thereafter). In October 2014, the vessel entered Cypriot waters accompanied by warships belonging to the Turkish navy. On January 2015, Turkey issued a maritime advisory (NAVTEX) which reserved areas of Cypriot EEZ. Barbaros was sent again to Cyprus waters accompanied by Turkish warships. The NAVTEX expired on April of that year, Barbaros was withdrawn from Cyprus' EEZ. This ultimately allowed the reunification talks to resume following the announcement of January by Greek Cypriot President that the RoC was pulling out in protest of Turkish aggression.

Turkey did not deploy any military force in the face of Cyprus. According to Bitsis and Kontos, all Turkey (and the TRNC) had done was to escalate its reaction to a point that had allowed Cyprus and the seven international companies to pursue business

as usual in Cypriot EEZ (Bitsis and Kontos, 2018: 57). Turkey's strategy of "coercive diplomacy" seems to be at play, even until recently. The only other serious incident between Turkey and another country was France. No serious military response was conducted to activities following threats of doing so. One example is Turkey's foreign ministry threatening ENI not to drill in block 6 which was granted by the RoC government and which falls under its claimed continental shelf. Turkey in fact did not hinder the exploration process which went smoothly (ENI, 2018; Bitsis and Kontos, 2018: 58). But things took a different turn following the announcement made by Eni that block 6 revealed an extended field to that of Egypt's Zohr, making the attraction of Cypriot EEZ take a new toll. What ensued was an obstruction of Turkish military vessels of ENI's drill ship while it was preparing to execute a drilling operation in Block 3 of Cyprus' EEZ (Reuters, 2018).

According to Erol Kaymak, it was only until the discovery of oil and gas in the Eastern Mediterranean that the Cyprus problem took a radical turning point in terms of EU/Turkey relations. It had been treated until then as a "manageable sore" (Kaymak, 2018: 17).

2. Problems linked to EEZ delimitation and the TRNC

Turkey relies on its own legal interpretation of the Law of The Sea through the 1958 Geneva convention and the principle of the median line concept for delimitation purposes. Thus, the same dispute between both Greece and Turkey is repeated between Turkey and the Republic of Cyprus. (Kaymak, 2018: 19). The Republic of Turkey submitted to the United Nations Secretary General a note verbale establishing its geographical coordinates of its continental shelf in the Eastern Mediterranean on April

10, 2014. This was the result of a delimitation agreement it had set with the TRNC established on September 21, 2011 and known as the “TRNC Agreement”. Based on this, they claim sovereign rights over a significant part of the RoC’s EEZ, these are parts of blocks 1, 4, 5, 6, and 7 as part of the Turkish continental shelf, and parts of blocks 1, 2, 3, 8, 9, 12 as part of the EEZ of the TRNC.

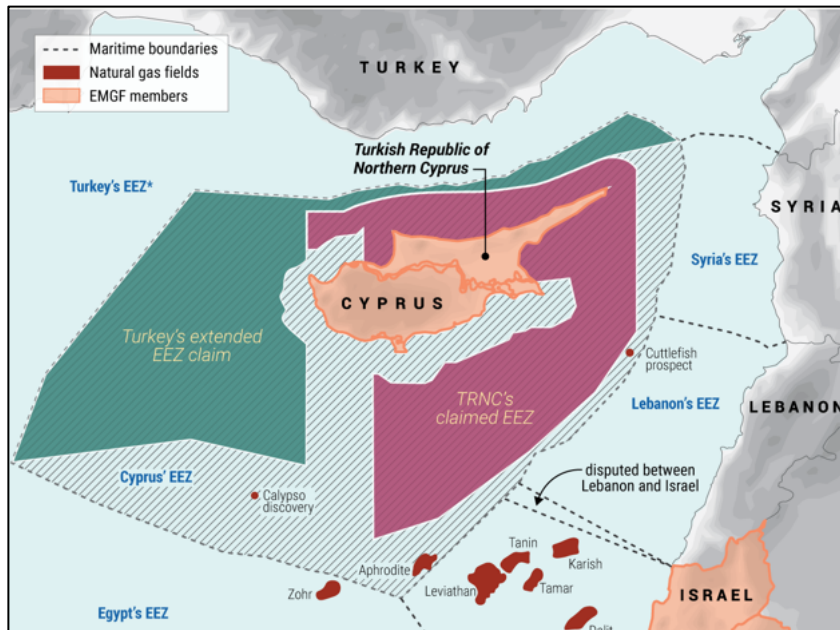


Figure 2 Map of Cypriot EEZ overlapping with Turkey and TRNC’s claimed EEZ (Geopolitical Futures, 2019)

Regarding the Northern Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), the administration reached an agreement with the Turkish Petroleum Corporation (TPAO) a day after the delimitation agreement had been signed with Turkey in September 2011. This agreement stipulated that TPAO would drill one onshore and six other offshore blocks around the island. Two of those blocks are situated well in the South of the island which makes the agreement not very feasible to implement in those areas for the least. At any rate, the TPAO drilled a well onshore in 2012 and was able to conduct seismic surveys offshore as well. Turkey has drilled 13 wells in the Mediterranean to no

avail. The “Energy Energy and Mine Policy” of 2017 indicates that Turkey plans to be more active in both seismic surveys and oil and gas exploration in both the Mediterranean and Black seas.

What initially started as a dream has quickly turned out to become an added layer of complexity in the ongoing dispute. According to Hugh Pope, the Greek Cypriots had hoped the gas discoveries would allow them to generate profit that would enable them to strengthen their leverage in the discussions. On the other hand, the Turkish Cypriot side was hoping that the gas revenues would enable them to settle the penalty fees related to compensation obligations to Greek Cypriots in property settlements and in the overall resolution (Pope, 2014: 90).

In September 2019, it was reported that the Greek Cypriot President Nikos Anastasiadis made an unofficial offer to Turkish Cypriot leader Mustafa Ankinici to split the revenues of the Energy fund, due to be established in 2022. According to the offer, Turkish Cypriots would benefit from 30% of the gas revenues while the Greek side would retain the rest (Hurriyet, 2019). This deal is reflective both of the “land” division of the island and the populace distribution to some extent. However, according to a Turkish newspaper, the deal was rejected because the Turkish Cypriot side would be completely dismissed from the management team of the activities and policies related to that field. What is more, the offer consisted of Turkish Cypriots giving up their EEZ claims. An offer had been made before by the Turkish Cypriot side on the matter to its Greek counterpart; it was rejected.

At any rate, according to Karbuz (2018), the same actions will be conducted by all sides. In fact, this is what has indeed been the case. Cyprus continues to drill in its EEZ. The Turkish and Turkish Cypriot side claims that these actions are “unilateral”

and “provocative”. Then Turkey conducts activities in Cypriot (and Greek) EEZs to which the response often is a condemnation of the provocations caused (Karbuz, 2018). The alternative, Karbuz suggests, is to put aside the Cyprus dispute and focus solely on the oil and gas sector for the time being among the two Cypriot communities. In a way that would allow Greek and Turkish Cypriots to divide the revenues in a stable environment. This could also lead to strengthen unification talks according to a report by the International Crisis Group in 2012. At any rate, this turn of events has not taken place yet and tensions between the two Hellenic states and the Turkish Republic and its satellite administration in Cyprus are still high.

B. New Regional alliances: Cyprus, Greece, Israel and Egypt and the EMFG

The strategic alliance that was forged between Greece, Israel and Cyprus was an “unprecedented geopolitical conjuncture that boosted the role of Cyprus in the region (Bitsis and Kontos, 2018: 58). According to Pope, one big difference contrasting the overall Cyprus problem and the Cyprus Hydrocarbon issue is the presence of Israel in the second (Pope, 2014: 92).

For the time being, total discovered natural gas resources in the Mediterranean’s East basin are expected to surpass 3000 billion cubic meters (BCM), two-thirds of which are located on the Levantine basin (OME, 2015). What is more, the United States Geological survey indicates that around 9,800 bcm of natural gas is present in that region and can be technically recovered (USGS, 2010).

The present gas discoveries in the Eastern Mediterranean, notably in regard to Israel and Cyprus, are more than sufficient to meet the domestic market needs of these countries for decades ahead (Karbuz, 2018: Chapter 12). Four ways of exporting gas are

presented: either by pipeline, through a Liquefied Natural Gas process (LNG), or a combination of both, and finally through the form of compressed natural gas should this option be deemed economically viable and feasible in the region (ibid).

From Cyprus, three options have been put on the table. The RoC had had plans to construct a Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) facility in its Southern shores, ultimately allowing it to export the gas from either or both the Cypriot and Israeli Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ). In fact, the EU already gets gas through the LNG method from Australia and the United States (Dorsman et. Al, 2018: Chapter 10). This could give Cyprus an advantageous position for the European market provided the prices are competitive. The price of electricity in the European Union is up to three to four times as much as that of the United States and Russia (Polak, 2014). The LNG option from Cyprus is put at halt for the time being given that disappointing results have been made and that the Aphrodite field needs further resource base research (Karbuz, 2018: Chapter 12.3.1). That being said, the Republic of Cyprus did receive a grant of 101.5 million euros from the European Union to build a Floating Storage and Regasification Unit (FSRU) to import and regasify LNG for production of electricity. The project is expected to cost more than 500 million euros (Kafkarides, 2018).

Should the LNG facility be built for Cyprus, imported volumes would make the country completely self-dependent on energy for the next 10 to 15 years. What is more, it would allow Cyprus to export all of its resources in the reservoirs, on the contrary to both Egypt and Israel, who are also well positioned in the gas discoveries and exploitation (Tsakiris, 2018: 35).

On the other hand, two pipeline projects from Cyprus are considered. The first links Cyprus to Egypt through a pipeline that aims at providing the latter for domestic

use or to feed the LNG plants for further use and exports. In 2014, both Egypt and Cyprus expressed their willingness to make use of this pipeline should sufficient quantities in Cyprus be discovered. This call had been reiterated in 2016 (Karbuz, 2018: Chapter 12). The companies investing in the Aphrodite field and the operators of the Idku facility in Egypt (namely Shell) are in contact to transport Cypriot gas through a pipeline that would connect the field to the facility and then be converted and re-exported from there as LNG by the year 2025 (Hellenic Shipping News, 2020). The period is expected to be of 17 years (Tsakiris, 2018: 32).

The second more significant pipeline through Cyprus is the Eastern Mediterranean Pipeline (EastMed), an offshore/onshore pipeline, that aims at connecting natural gas from Israel's fields to mainland Europe (Greece) through Cyprus and the Greek island of Crete. The project has received in 2013 the European Commission's approval and under regulation 347/2013, it was designated as an EU Project of Common Interest. From 2015 to 2018, the Commission paid more than 35 million euros for technical, environmental and financial studies for the purpose of the pipeline being built. The Eastmed pipeline passes through the continental shelf claimed by Turkey and so its success is not guaranteed. The same is the case for the Israel/Turkey pipeline, which has to pass through Greek Cypriot waters, and which allows the RoC either to reject the application or to impose conditions on its passing. In this case, the RoC has its own submarine pipeline regulations that need to be met as well (No.579/2014). If this is the case, the route of the line must be agreed by the RoC (Karbuz, 2014). This could therefore have political implications on the EastMed pipeline as well.

The pipeline is expected to cost around six billion euros and is being co-developed by a Greek/Italian venture named IGI Poseidon S.A. The pipeline's estimated capacity would be to transport around 8 bcm per year (Karbuz, 2018: Chapter 12). On January 2, 2020, Greece, Cyprus, and Israel signed the accord to build the pipeline in Athens. Provisions under the accord stipulate the necessity to ensure the security of the pipeline, which can be seen as bolstered especially given the fact that it is a "Project of Common Interest" for the EU.

The Israeli Minister of National Infrastructure, Energy and Water, Yuval Steinitz, declared on March 9, 2021 that the Eastmed Pipeline linking Israel to mainland Europe through Cyprus could be put in place within five years (CNA, 2021). The EU had been the most generous funder and investor on the project so far, with more than 1 hundred million euros spent on feasibility studies. He further addressed the rift with Turkey, urging it to reconsider taking part of the growing alliance between Greece, Cyprus, Israel and Egypt. The same day, Israel and Cyprus had reached an agreement regarding the guidelines for companies regarding the exploitation of two gas fields that may cross each other's EEZs (CNA, 2021).

In August 2019, the Greek, Cypriot, French and Italian navies conducted combined naval-air drills in the Eastern Mediterranean. This had come after French and Greek navies conducted a similar exercise weeks before (Naval News, 2019). France had announced that it was "concern[ed] about the tensions caused by Turkey's unilateral decisions on oil exploration" (cited in *ibid*). In December 2019, France participated alongside Greece, Cyprus, the United Arab Emirates and Egypt in maritime military exercises "MEDUSA" (Euractiv, 2020; Greek City Times, 2019).

1. The EMGF

The EastMed Gas Forum was informally established in 2019 by Greece, Cyprus, Israel, The Palestinian National Authority, Italy and Jordan. Its first ever meeting took place on January 14th in Cairo. In August 2019, the European Union announced that it supported the EMGF by pledging 500,000 euros as a direct contribution.

According to Mitchell, the EMFG “represents the culmination of a decade-long process between four states: Israel, Egypt, Greece, and Cyprus” (Mitchell, 2020). The presence of Jordan and the Palestinian National Authority in the forum has been subject to much debate in political and academic fields. However, most tie them to the presence of Israel and the growing dependence on Israeli gas for both players. As for Italy, its presence is mostly linked to the important role ENI has in the Eastern Mediterranean exploration and drilling activities and for its role in the EU (ibid).

The second meeting of the EMGF in July 2019 was marked by the presence of the European Commissioner for Energy and Climate Action. In January 2020, the third meeting was held and the EMFG submitted its statute to the European Commission for review and approval prior to its signing (Mitchell, 2020). On September 22, the EMFG was established as a regional organization in a regional intergovernmental organization in Cairo, Egypt. Its headquarters are also to be in Egypt. What is more, following the announcement of the organization, both France and the UAE applied to become members of the forum and the EU and the US applied to be granted observer status (Reuters, 2020). In March 2021, France was approved as a member, but the UAE was rejected following a VETO by the Palestinian authority (Capital Greece, 2021; The New Arab, 2021). The charter of the organization also came into effect in March 2021 (Ahram, 2021). The Eastmed Gas Forum excludes Turkey, which is at odds with most

of the countries that are its members. That being said, repeated calls have been made by various countries in the forum, notably Israel, for Turkey to be part of the forum should it wish to.

The European Union is no short in cooperative initiatives in the Eastern and Southern Mediterranean areas, be them the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) and the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), and energy is one of the working areas in both. For the Eastern Mediterranean gas promises, it is unlikely the European Union will move from its previous strategy of cooperation between EU member states and the other side via bilateral and independent form from the EU framework, but using EU instruments (Giuli, 2021).

The EU has been using a focused and regional approach regarding the Mediterranean for EU energy security (ibid). The goal is to create a Euro-Mediterranean oil and gas market that abides and follows EU rules (Tagliapietra and Zachmann, 2016). The strategy of creating a single regulatory space around Europe is a fundamental pillar for realizing energy security (EC, 2006; Giuli, 2021). The ENP's energy cooperation focuses on EU-neighboring state plans and not regional initiatives (ibid).

The role of the EU as an institution (in addition to member states) in the EMFG can be therefore understood as an extension and continuation of the energy security policy of the EU as a whole where the Eastmed Gas Forum could serve as an additional platform to serve EU interests through an EU-oriented framework and using EU instruments but independently from its direct framework. The next chapter explores the importance and relevance of Eastmed Gas for the European Union and other factors of interest. It then attempts to find links between this newfound importance and a change of discourse regarding Cyprus and the Cyprus question.

CHAPTER IV

THE EASTMED GAS DISCOVERIES: A GAMECHANGER FOR THE EU?

A. EU's Energy needs and the Eastmed

The EU's climate policy is underway. The target is to reduce GHG emissions by 20% in 2020, 40% in 2030, and 60% reduction in 2040 as compared with 1990 levels (European Commission, 2014). According to Dorsman et. Al, the EU can only reconcile CO2 reduction and energy independence through switching from oil and coal to natural gas, which is the least polluting fossil fuel (2017: Chapter 10). The Cyprus conflict gained a new momentum and a shift in approaches from various players following the discovery of natural gas in the region.

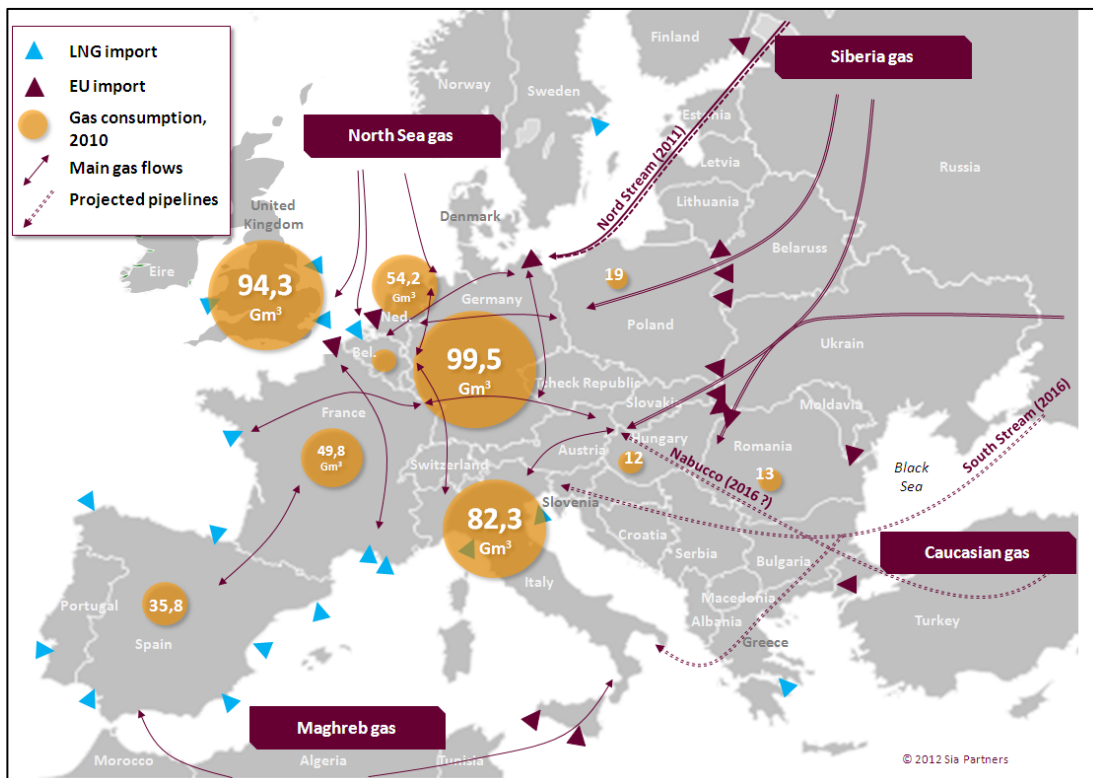


Figure 3 Map of European Gas Consumption in 2012 (Sia Partners, 2012)

85% of total EU imports were through pipeline gas in 2018, these were essentially coming from Russia, Norway and Algeria (Tsakiris, 2018: 26). This is why in the 2010 European Commission's EU Security of Gas Supply Regulation (R.994/2010), the need to build additional LNG terminals for imports of additional sources using this method. However, since 2010, the LNG imports to the EU have been decreasing even though US LNG has made it successfully to both the Baltic region and Poland (Tsakiris, 2018: 25). Kirillos argues in favor of an LNG plant instead of the already high dependency on pipeline routes which "render the exporter hostage [...] and give intermediary states inordinate power" (ibid).

Russian gas remains a very strategic necessity for EU energy security at the time being. Russian gas is very competitive and the possibility to bypass Ukraine to make it to European markets adds to its advantages (Henderson and Sharples, 2018). The Russian gas sector was therefore spared the round of sanctions that hit Russian elites and businesses in 2014, amid a booming energy trade between the two sides (Tsakiris, 2018: 26). Since 2013, Russian gas supply to the EU has expanded both in relative and absolute terms (BP, 2018). This has been accompanied by a modest increase in Norwegian and Algerian gas, a sharp cut in half in gas supply in Libya, and a complete halt from Egypt following the catastrophic consequences of political turmoil in Egypt and civil war in Libya (ibid).

The European Union is seeking to make up for the deteriorating quantities of its original energy sources. According to Panayiotis Tilliros, there is a need for the Union to secure its "fourth corridor" in the Caspian Sea (namely through Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan) and its "fifth corridor" i.e., the Eastern Mediterranean. Tilliros states that it would be a good and wise solution for the EU to separate routes of the fourth and fifth

corridors (Tilliros, 2017: 2). Cyprus' position is therefore critical in the fifth corridor since it is the meeting point of the Eastern Mediterranean gas producing countries and the Old Continent.

The European Union's stance on EEZ demarcation is emphasized in its 2014 "Report on a 2030 framework for climate and energy policies" issued by the European Parliament. The solution of the disputes "in the context of the EU policy on oil and gas drilling at sea, emphasis should be put on preventing potential hazards and delineating exclusive economic zones for the Member States concerned and relevant third countries in accordance with the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, to which all the Member States, and the EU itself, are signatories" (article 87).

The geostrategic benefits of the European Union in the Eastern Mediterranean following the discovery of natural gas can be summed up in four main factors. The first is to achieve energy security of supply by diversifying its sources and limiting the strong dependence on Russian gas, ultimately limiting its role in the region (ElBassoussy, 2018). In fact, 35% of the gas that EU countries receive comes from Russia, giving it an important leverage through this high dependence. Germany in particular has strong affinities to Russia because of this reality. Cutting the wings of Russia through limiting this need would of course limit the latter in being a significant political and economic status (Marketos, 2018). Thus, the EU would have strong interests in developing and assisting in the production of natural gas in the region.

The second factor is the neoliberal way of thinking which consists the belief that economic cooperation in the Eastmed region might be a decisive factor for peace and stability and render all issues that are focal points of tension irrelevant, solvable and easily managed (ElBassoussy, 2018). Creating a hub for natural gas in the Eastern

Mediterranean is considered to be an opportunity for the “Economic Peace” principle (Marketos, 2018). Third, the vast economic and financial benefits oil and gas exploration for European companies should not be disregarded. As a matter of fact, a sizable number of European companies have already begun exploration, exploitation and drilling activities in the region. Italian Eni, Greek Energean, French Total and British Gas (affiliate of BP), have already signed contracts and are present in the region, like in Egypt, Cyprus, Palestine, Israel and Lebanon.

Finally, because two countries of the EU are at the heart of the Eastern Mediterranean, the EU cannot but find itself implicated in the ongoing events occurring there. With Turkey’s gross breach of the Cypriot Exclusive Economic Zone and its inability to reach an understanding with Greece on the matter, the EU cannot be a passive member. In fact, the Turkish Government has begun to see the European Union as a regional rival (Ulusoy, 2016: 403). What is more, although it is clearly more economically viable to have the EastMed gas transported via Turkish routes like the TANAP and TAP pipelines, however, from an energy security perspective, this would give Turkey an unprecedented leverage on the EU. The search for new allies is therefore a critical affair. What is more, with the growing threats from within Turkey both from radical factions and Kurdish opposition armed movements, there is a real fear of attacks on those lines (Marketos, 2018). Turkey itself being now surrounded by Greece and Cyprus has adopted a rather hostile view of the EU, because it sees now that Cyprus’ EU accession was not a tactical but rather a strategic move aimed at the EU penetrating into the Eastern Mediterranean, ultimately compromising and weakening Turkey’s dominance (Ulusay, 2016:403). In fact, this argument seems similar to those claiming that Greece had been persuading the EU before granting Cyprus’ the nomination of the

necessity to have an EU outpost on the Mediterranean. Through this EU enlargement, Turkey and Russia would come out as the biggest losers according to Hill. Ulusay adds that the corridor linking East to West would be achieved for the EU (Ulusay, 2016: 403).

The European Union had begun a policy of energy diversification since the early 2000s, with the ‘Towards a European strategy for the security of energy supply’ green paper. Its second revised green paper “European Strategy for Sustainable, Competitive and Secure Energy” of 2006 shed the light on the necessity of providing uninterrupted energy among EU member states should a crisis occur via a rapid solidarity mechanism. Other main points include the tackling of climate change and focus on new technologies. It is the basis for the current EU energy policy (Dorsman et al, 2018: Chapter 10). This was proven to be difficult to implement (Doc). At any rate, in 2014, under the Juncker commission, the EU energy union was launched, serving as a foundation for the EU energy security. According to a report issued by the Directorate-General for external policies in the Policy Department of the European Parliament (AFEC), it is a priority for the EU to promote geopolitical stability and development in the economy of the region, especially after the refugee crisis of 2015 proved how issues in the region could shake the EU’s internal stability (AFEC, 2017). This is clearly resonated in the revised 2015 European Union Neighborhood Policy, stressing the importance of the southern neighborhood (EUNP, 2015).

The EU’s need to diversify energy sources is highlighted in the 2008 European Commission “Second Strategic Energy Review – An EU Energy Security and Solidarity Action Plan”, along with making best use of its indigenous energy resources and other aspects (EC, 2008: 5). The European Commission further developed in 2011 ‘The EU

Energy Policy: Engaging with Partners beyond Our Borders’, where it shed the light on the need to increase transparency among EU member states on contracts with non-EU states. Moreover, coordination over positions in international organisations and promoting partnerships with key partner countries were mentioned as pillars (EC, 2011: 15). This evolution on the necessity to diversify both means, methods and transparency were the result of the 2006 and 2009 Russian-Ukrainian-European gas crises to some large extent (AFEP, 2017: 9).

In 2014, the European Commission issued the ‘European Energy Security Strategy’ with a list of measures aiming at achieving that goal. Among those goals are the need to diversify energy source countries and routes, increase production and efficiency, have a united voice in external platforms in energy issues and protect infrastructure and have a solidarity mechanism (EC, 2014). In that sense, should Cyprus emerge as a potential LNG hub, this would allow to diversify the sources of energy. Moreover, through the EastMed pipeline, a new secure route would therefore be at the disposal of the Union (Tsakiris, 2018: 35). The unprecedented rift and political standoff between the European Union and Russia over the Ukraine crisis (followed by the annexation of Crimea) led to a historical reconsideration of the EU/Russia energy partnership at all EU levels (AFEP, 2017: 9). Leaders of the EU called for a united front and strategy in regard to energy security (EC, 2014). Russia’s prices are expected to remain much lower of those provided by the EastMed gas, which means that it is unlikely that EU’s dependence on Russian gas will be limited to alarming levels for Russia. However, the presence of alternative sources might add pressure on Russia on its pricing (Karbuz, 2018: Chapter 12). This aim to limit Russia’s influence by the EU is heavily welcomed by the United States which has also expressed significant interest in

EastMed gas, especially in Israel (ibid). The 2014 strategy mentioned that ‘the EU [should] engage in intensified political and trade dialogue with Northern African and Eastern Mediterranean partners, in particular with a view to creating a Mediterranean gas hub in the South of Europe’.

When the discussion is about a solidarity mechanism, Dorsman et al hint that the mechanism would make sure that no EU member state is left alone in times of crises, in risk assessment, prevention and emergency plans (2018: Chapter 10.3.3). This could mean that should Cyprus face an external threat coming from Russia or from the TRNC, this mechanism could enable a strong EU solidarity and action plan to counter the threat more effectively as was the case until today in terms of Turkish aggression. As for strengthening indigenous sources of energy within the EU, the result is that the EU could depend less on foreign suppliers and lead to a strengthened bargaining power at its hand. Cyprus’ EEZ could ultimately allow the EU to gather a further source of “indigenous” supplies. This is no longer a Cypriot domestic issue; it is a European one par excellence. This could also compensate for the depleting resources in the North Sea (Tsakiris, 2018: 35).

In 2015, the EU’s Energy Diplomacy Action Plan was published. It mentioned ‘the strategic potential of the Eastern Mediterranean region’ which would enable the EU to ‘diversification of sources, suppliers and routes’. It called the Union to ‘focus its diplomatic support on’ as a “key priority” (10995/15, CFSP/PESC 410:3).

B. Other considerations

According to Martin Beck, Europe has five main security challenges in the Southern Mediterranean. The first is linked to the multipolar system taking place in the

region following the reduced role of the United States in the area and the shuffling of alliances in the region, especially following the Obama administration stances. The second is the growing security links between the Gulf and the Mediterranean region, with the formation of hidden alliances between Israel and the Gulf monarchies on one hand, and Iran and its proxies in the Mediterranean on the other. Third is the growing difficulty for the EU to accommodate both its normative stance on the Israeli/Palestinian issue and its realpolitik, especially after Trump took reign of the White House (Beck, 2020: Chapter 2).

Fourth, the refugee influx from the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean into Europe created a new momentum for the European Union. All European countries, be it political elites or population by and large securitized the influx and a “refugee crisis” was created (Beck, 2019). Moreover, populist parties were able to mobilize much larger segments of the population than their actual capacities in this particular crisis, leading to a mass party mobilization from the whole political spectrum, left to right (ibid). Refugees became the sole burden on the European continent and the political discourse by far-right movements made echo across the continent. Marine Le Pen, head of the (then) Front National, stated that immigrants from Southern Mediterranean were flooding France and draining its resources (Cooper, 2017). Notably, the populist discourse took grip of both discourse and action of more moderate and centric parties. This was the case in the United Kingdom and Denmark. In the latter, the Danish Social Democratic Party voted in favor of an anti-immigration law consisting of confiscating property of refugees by state authorities in 2016 (Al Jazeera, 2016).

Finally, the growing Islamist threat from the Eastern Mediterranean and the Levant area has had an added layer of security concern in terms of EU domestic and

external politics. Not only is the threat in the Levant area with the declaration of the Islamic Caliphate in the Levant but has also had domestic implications. The 2015 Paris attacks and numerous other attacks in the European continent and the presence of radical Islamists of European nationalities has added to the concerns linked to refugees mentioned above (Beck, 2020).

Thus, this description of the security concerns in the Eastern and Southern Mediterranean for the European Union security allows us to draw a parallel line to that of the importance and strategic positionality of Eastern Mediterranean gas discoveries. Indeed, Cyprus now becomes a very-much needed outpost for the European Union in the heart of a region that has been becoming more and more destabilized on differing levels and in which the very stability of the Union is at risk of fracture. We can therefore say that it is not only the prospects of becoming an energy hub that make the Eastern Mediterranean of great concern for the European Union in recent years. The security of the European Union now partly depends on it. This is echoed by Tilliros who claims that Cyprus had played a critical role for the European Union, especially in terms of defense policy. Citing the example of the “explosive” situation in the Middle East, he mentions how Cyprus was a “defense bastion and border” to Europe in face of terrorist attacks and flows of migrants (Tilliros, 2017:2).

According to Mavroyiannis, Cyprus’ geostrategic role for the European Union rests in the valuable characteristics of the island state which are predictability, stability and reliability (Mavroyiannis, 2014: 54). According to him, Cyprus is an “element of stability” in the region, it has further contributed to promote peace and stability in a region filled with turmoil thanks to its belonging to the EU, hence to the security apparatus of the West. What is more, its relatively modest size means it does not

constitute a real threat to the neighboring countries, its history further allows it to play a mediating role, being a member of the Non-Aligned movement and sharing good relations with both Israel and Arab countries. What is most important however is that being a member of the EU, it represents the easternmost outpost of the Union and hence an extension to its vision and goals.

Another important point for Cyprus is the role it plays in the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) in its southern dimension. Cyprus' good relations with Russia which had until 2004 been a major investor on the island also gives it an added value in terms of mediation between the EU and the Federation (ibid: 58-59).

Within the European Union, Mavroyiannis argues that the island has been an important player and an active member aspiring to boost and promote European Integration. (Mavroyiannis, 2014: 60). As for defense and security areas of the EU, the author claims that Cyprus' determination to become a member of the Partnership for Peace program by NATO is a good example of Cyprus' commitment to European security. (ibid: 62). To this date however, Cyprus has not become a member of the PfP. The author further mentions the role of the Republic of Cyprus' effort in solving the island's long-lasting crisis, which is ultimately beneficial to the EU as a whole.

Finally, Cyprus' policies in regard to the oil and gas sector are seen by the author as positive and beneficial to the whole of the EU. The threat from Turkey is one that should be taken seriously by the states of the union.

C. EU stances in the wake of Eastmed Gas discoveries: trying to accommodate and manage multiple crises

It appears that the European Union has become keener not to "lose" Greek Cypriots than to become an impartial actor in the Cyprus dispute and ultimately

benefitting both Greek and Turkish Cypriots. One such example is the celebration of the proclamation of the TRNC event that took place in November 2015. An incident involving Turkish Cypriots where the perpetrators were Greek counterparts attacking their cars and injuring two was gone unnoticed by the European Union. The EU failed to take a position on the matter and no press release, nor any form of condemnation was made in this regard (Casaglia, 2018). The EU's inability to take part of the local debates in Cyprus, be them political or social renders it an illegitimate player in the eyes of Turkish Cypriots. According to one interviewee by Casaglia: "The EU is not a political actor; you are just someone who finances projects. [...] The EU is a sugar daddy, that's it" (M.H., Turkish Cypriot civil society – interviewed in 2015; from Casaglia, 2018).

Failing locally in Cyprus to remain equidistant from both Greek and Turkish Cypriots, the EU's the normative strength that the EU likes to promote was put at test again in October 2015, two weeks before critical elections for Erdogan's party in Turkey. The migration crisis proved to be dire for European values, which were all put at bay to put refugees at bay. The annual progress report published by the European Commission on Turkey's progress shed the light on the dire situation of freedom of speech. It was purposely delayed from Brussels until after the elections would have taken place (FT, 2015). One EU ambassador claimed that "[t]his is not healthy" and that the EU had delayed this report "at the whim of the Sultan" (ibid). According to the Guardian Observer editorial, "[more dangerous still for a Europe that continues [...] to pride itself on its liberal, democratic values is Erdogan's implicit, reciprocal demand: that the EU turns a blind eye to the many abuses that have become routine in what, under this divisive president and his ruling Justice and Development

party, is rapidly turning into a frightened, violent and authoritarian police state.”
(Guardian, 2015).

To say that the stances of the EU radically changed in favor of the Republic of Cyprus following the beginning of discoveries of gas in the region is not true. In 2015, as the refugee crisis was looming, the EU member states were more than ready to compromise their normative stances on the Turkish occupation of the Northern part of the island to win Turkey over. In a visit to Turkish President Erdogan on, German chancellor Angela Merkel noted that “Germany is ready this year to open chapter 17 and make preparations for (chapters) 23 and 24” (EUObserver, 2015). These chapters are quite sensitive, notably 23 and 24 related to justice, security and fundamental rights. Cyprus had in fact shared its complete opposition to opening them, considering them a “red line” (ibid).

1. Turkey gets tough on Cyprus, the EU gets tougher on Turkey

There are three events that would lead to a hardening of position by the EU toward Turkey and noting an aggressive tone in regard to Cyprus. The first is the military coup in Turkey and its aftermath of mass purge that was witnessed in the public sector. The second is the growing nationalist sentiment in European countries and the inevitability of EU representatives and officials to appease these sentiments by giving them what they would like to hear. The third is the growing role Cyprus had been preparing alongside Greece, Israel and Egypt and the American backing, notably to the Cyprus-Greece-Israel axis. According to various sources however, it was not the oil and gas discoveries in Cyprus that had affected the relations between the EU and Turkey. (Ahval, 2018; Reuters, 2016).

Until February 2018, Turkey's response to drilling activities in Cypriot EEZ was purely of diplomatic nature. When Turkey used military power to prevent the ENI ship from going into block 3, the incident did not prompt an aggressive direct EU response. Rather, a simple warning was issued. The chairman of the European Council, Donald Tusk, said "I call on Turkey to avoid threats or actions against any EU member and instead commit to good neighborly relations, peaceful dispute settlement and respect for territorial sovereignty." (Reuters, 2018). This vague speech, not directly implying Cyprus nor its sovereignty, was echoed by an EU spokeswoman from the European Commission "Turkey needs to commit unequivocally to neighborly relations and avoid any kind of source of friction, threat or action directed against a member state." (ibid). This was amid the continued dependence of the block on Turkey's role in containing the Syrian refugees (ibid). The EU seemed therefore determined not to bring in a defensive attitude and tone in regard to Cyprus.

The European Union adopted a much more defensive tone following additional breaches done by Turkey to Cyprus' EEZ. In January 2019, Barbaros began seismic surveys in Cypriot EEZ. In May 2019, Turkey dispatched once more drilling ships to Cyprus' EEZ. Those were accompanied by military vessels. In June, Turkish Foreign Minister stated that the drilling operations had begun.

On June 14, 2019, Malta hosted the Sixth South EU Summit. The "Cyprus Issue" was one of the main topics discussed (EU South Summit Website, 2019). The Valetta declaration noted: "We are closely following the situation in Cyprus and, we reiterate our support to the efforts by the United Nations Good Offices Mission [...]. The solution must safeguard Cyprus' sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity, without guarantees, rights of intervention and military presence of foreign troops. In this

respect, we expect Turkey to demonstrate tangible commitment for a comprehensive settlement within the UN framework.” France’s Macron said “I wish here once again to reiterate my full solidarity with Cyprus and my commitment to respect its sovereignty. Turkey must cease its illegal activities in the EEZ of Cyprus. The European Union will not show any weakness on this subject”. Finally, EU Commission’s president Juncker said that “[w]hat Turkey is doing in the territorial waters of Cyprus is totally unacceptable. The Commission has been charged to propose measures to be taken as soon as possible when it comes to this conflict and will do so, and these will not be soft measures.” (ibid).

Cypriot President Anastasiades thanked his counterparts of Greece, Italy, Malta, France, Portugal and Spain for “expressing their condemnation [of Turkish] actions in the Eastern Mediterranean [... and] to condemn this behaviour that goes fully against the principles and values of the European Union, [since] it is a candidate for EU membership.” Greece’s Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras noted this European backing to Cyprus, claiming that it had been “the first time after decades of international violations of international law by Turkey that the EU, after coordinated actions by Greece and Cyprus, has condemned Turkish actions in such a clear and decisive manner”. (South EU Summit Website, 2019).

Prior to the European Council meeting that was held on July 15, 2019, the German Minister of State for Europe Michel Roth said that “[t]he provocations of Turkey are unacceptable to all of us. [...] We have now found a balanced language that keeps all our options open, including of course sanctions. [...] I can only hope that we do not now add another crisis to the many conflicts and crises. Turkey knows what’s at stake and the European Union is united on the side of Cyprus.” (Reuters, 2019).

The Austrian Foreign Minister Alexander Schallenberg was quoted saying that “[i]t is very clear that we stand behind Cyprus, this makes sense since we never recognized the Turkish occupation of Northern Cyprus. It is normal for Cyprus to want to define their own natural resources. [...] We will decide today about a number of measures against Turkey [...] but it goes without saying that more sanctions are also possible.”

The EU Council adopted the following conclusions in regard to Turkey:

“1. [...] [T]he Council deplores that, despite the European Union's repeated calls to cease its illegal activities in the Eastern Mediterranean, Turkey continued its drilling operations west of Cyprus and launched a second drilling operation northeast of Cyprus within Cypriot territorial waters. The Council reiterates the serious immediate negative impact that such illegal actions have across the range of EU-Turkey relations. The Council calls again on Turkey to refrain from such actions, [...] and respect the sovereignty and sovereign rights of Cyprus in accordance with international law.

12. In light of Turkey’s continued and new illegal drilling activities, [...] decides to suspend negotiations on the Comprehensive Air Transport Agreement and agrees not to hold the Association Council and further meetings of the EU-Turkey high-level dialogues for the time being. The Council endorses the Commission’s proposal to reduce the pre-accession assistance to Turkey for 2020 and invites the European Investment Bank to review its lending activities [...]

5. [...] [I]nvites the High Representative and the Commission to continue work on options for targeted measures in light of Turkey’s continued drilling activities in the Eastern Mediterranean. [...]

This resulted in the suspension of around 164 million euros in aid to Turkey. As for the European Investment Bank lending to the country, it was amounted at around 434 million euros in 2018 (NYTimes, 2019).

In early October 2019, Turkey deployed a vessel in a block that was already granted by the Republic of Cyprus to the French and Italian consortium. On October 14, 2019, The EU Council convened, and the following conclusions were made in regard to Turkey's drilling activities in Cypriot EEZ: "[T]he Council reaffirms its full solidarity with Cyprus, regarding the respect of its sovereignty and sovereign rights in accordance with international law. It recalls its conclusions of 15 July 2019 in all its parts, and notably that delimitation of exclusive economic zones and continental shelf should be addressed through dialogue and negotiation in good faith, in full respect of international law and in accordance with the principle of good neighbourly relations." In parallel, the European Parliament was seized of the Turkish military operations in Syria and some MEPs called for sanctions on Turkey. (Europarlament, 2019).

In a question addressed to the EU Council by MEP Thierry Mariani from October 2019 and answered by the European Commission in February 2020, the Council "underlined the serious negative impact that illegal actions such as those in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Aegean Sea have across the range of EU-Turkey relations". It however "maintain[ed] that an open and frank dialogue with Turkey, especially in the current difficult circumstances, remain[ed] important and is in the interest of both sides", while maintaining that it "consistently affirmed its full solidarity with Cyprus regarding respect for its sovereignty and sovereign rights in accordance with international law" (E-003449/2019(ASW)).

On November 19, 2019, the EU Council adopted for the first a set of sanctions as a response to Turkish illegal activities in Cypriot EEZ. In fact, the EU decided to target “natural and legal persons, entities and bodies which [...] have been identified by the Council as: “(a) being responsible for or involved in, including by planning, preparing, participating in, directing, or assisting, drilling activities in relation to hydrocarbon exploration and production, or hydrocarbon extraction resulting from such activities, which have not been authorised by the Republic of Cyprus, within its territorial sea or in its exclusive economic zone or on its continental shelf [...]; (b) providing financial, technical or material support for drilling activities in relation to hydrocarbon exploration and production, or hydrocarbon extraction resulting from such activities, referred to in point (a); (c) being associated [to them]” (COUNCIL REGULATION (EU) 2019/1890, 2019).

On August 28, 2020, the Cypriot Foreign Minister Nikos Christodoulidis warned that “Europe’s credibility is at stake” and that he had “spoke[n] about EU principles and values and there is no ambiguity regarding these principles and values. It is therefore very important that we also defend the credibility of the EU”. His Austrian counterpart went further citing that “Turkey despises every convention and challenges Europe”. He also made an “absolutely essential” call for the European Union to stand firmly behind Cyprus and Greece. Finally, he shared that “[he] thinks that slowly the last dreamer in Europe should wake up in terms of EU-Turkey relations” (Greek City Times, 2020).

A European Parliament motion resolution (2020/2774(RSP) was published on September 14, 2020. It begins with a seemingly exhaustive list of the historical incidents that have occurred in the Eastern Mediterranean, notably in terms of growing accords on one hand, and a list of breaches done by Turkey. It “calls, in this regard, on

the Turkish Government to end the repeated violations of Greek and Cypriot airspace and territorial waters, and to respect the territorial integrity and sovereignty of all of its neighbours” (1), “condemns Turkey’s illegal activities on the continental shelf and in the EEZs of Greece and Cyprus, which run counter to EU interests, and calls on the Turkish authorities to cease these activities” (2). Furthermore, it “[s]tresses the need to respect the legal capacity of EU Member States [...] which include, inter alia, the right to explore and exploit natural resources in accordance with the EU *acquis* and international law, including the UNCLOS” (3). What is more, it “calls for a list of further restrictive measures vis-à-vis Turkey to be developed and discussed at the European Council on 24 and 25 September 2020” (4). In regard to securing the area, it called on “the appropriate forums within NATO, and especially the High-Level Task Force on Conventional Arms Control, to discuss arms control in the Eastern Mediterranean as a matter of urgency “(6).

Importantly, no single clause in this resolution even mentions the Cyprus question at its core. Cyprus (along with Greece) is taken as “pillars of stability in the region and in bolstering the EU’s energy security” (9) but the role of the EU in promoting peace in Cyprus as a means to reach an agreement with Turkey and to stabilize the region is almost completely dismissed. Cyprus is, therefore, a satellite country for the EU. Its rights are not to be infringed by Turkey, but the internal solution to the island seems to be completely secondary in this case.

On September 16, 2020, Charles Michel, the leader of the European Council said “[t]he European Union stands in solidarity with Cyprus as it faces a grave situation. That is why we have decided to call a summit on relations with Turkey”. On the responsiveness of the EU in regard to further breaches to Cypriot EEZ, he stated that

“[a]s long as there are illegal actions against member states, the EU’s response should be immediate.” Taking a decisive tone, he mentioned that any infringement of the rights of Cyprus (and Greece) is not only their domestic issue, but an EU problem since its rights are being hampered as well (Euractiv, 2020).

In December 2020, the European Council adopted the following conclusions in regard to Cypriot EEZ: “The EU remains committed to defending its interests and those of its member states [...]. [It] invited the Council to adopt additional listings based on its Decision of 11 November 2019 concerning restrictive measures in view of Turkey's unauthorised drilling activities in the Eastern Mediterranean. It also invited the High Representative and the Commission to submit a report on the state of play concerning the EU-Turkey [relations ...], including on the extension of the scope of the above-mentioned decision, for consideration at the latest at the March 2021 European Council. The European Council condemned Turkey's unilateral steps in Varosha and called for full respect of relevant UN Security Council resolutions. It also supported the speedy resumption of negotiations and remained fully committed to a comprehensive settlement of the Cyprus problem, within the UN framework and in line with EU principles.” (European Council, 2020).

D. Taking sides in the conflict? The EU as a promoter of peace with gas in the mix

To underline the growing role the Eastmed gas discoveries have given to Cyprus as a whole, EU’s high representative Borrell stated that “Tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean and relations with Turkey have been one of the greatest EU challenges in 2020 and this will likely remain the case for 2021.” (Borrell, 2020). Obviously, this could be summed up to only the Eastern Mediterranean issue since it had taken a

significant portion of the relations between the EU and Turkey. From Turkey's ongoing provocative activities in Cypriot and Greek EEZs, to its breach of the Turkey/EU joint statement and its encouragement to send refugees to Greece to have leverage on the EU, the HR/VP stated the many challenges that are yet to be solved. But, most importantly, the centrality of Cyprus' dispute is put on display: "I reached the conclusion that disagreements with Greece and the non-resolution of the Cyprus issue are centerpieces" (Borrell, 2020). To place Cyprus' dispute at the core of EU/Turkey relations is relatively an issue that has been present ever since the Republic joined the Union in 2004. However, the mention of both "Greece" and "Cyprus" may hint to a new trend where the EU *could* assume a new role behind the two Hellenic Republics and where two camps are clearly drawn. On one hand, Turkey and its unilateral actions; and on the other: the Hellenic Republics completely backed by the EU. What is more interesting is the fact that this may appear as a completely sovereign decision taken by the EU and not taken under pressure of a VETO by Greece nor Cyprus as was the case on various issues linked to Turkey where concessions had to be made by the two camps: the EU versus Greece and/or Cyprus.

This is an interesting position for Borrell contrasted to an answer he had given to a Cypriot Member of the European Parliament (Loucas Fourlas) where he had asked him in 2019 if "the Union [...] have a strategic plan to prevail upon Turkey to cease its provocative and menacing behaviour and fully assume its responsibilities for resolving the Cyprus problem?" (E-003543/2019). Borrell's answer was quite similar to the traditional path taken by the European Union which "supported and accompanied the talks between the leaders of the two communities in Cyprus for a fair, comprehensive and viable settlement [...] also welcomed the work done by the two Cypriot leaders and

the United Nations (UN) Secretary General to achieve terms of reference to serve as a consensus starting point. The EU fully supports the parties' commitment and determination to achieve a settlement based on a bi-zonal, bi-communal federation with political equality as set out in the relevant UN Security Council resolutions.” (E-003543/2019(ASW)).

It is however important to focus on a very important component of EU’s handling of Cypriot gas reserves. In a European Council meeting on July 15, 2019; the council discussed the issue of Turkish drilling activities in the Eastern Mediterranean and noted that "1. [...] despite the European Union's repeated calls to cease its illegal activities in the Eastern Mediterranean, Turkey continued its drilling operations west of Cyprus and launched a second drilling operation northeast of Cyprus within Cypriot territorial waters [...] The Council calls again on Turkey to refrain from such actions [...] and respect the sovereignty and sovereign rights of Cyprus in accordance with international law.

2. The Council, welcoming the invitation by the [Greek Cypriot] Government of Cyprus to negotiate with Turkey, notes that delimitation of exclusive economic zones and continental shelf should be addressed through dialogue and negotiation in good faith, in full respect of international law and in accordance with the principle of good neighbourly relations.

3. The EU remains fully committed to supporting the UN-led efforts to work with the parties with a view to creating the conditions conducive to resuming negotiations on a comprehensive settlement of the Cyprus problem. In this regard, the Council recalls that it remains crucial that Turkey commits and contributes to such a settlement, including its external aspects, within the UN framework in accordance with

relevant UNSC Resolutions and in line with the principles on which the EU is founded and the *acquis*” Furthermore, the Council had decided to suspend talks on bilateral agreements with Turkey (4) (EC, 2019).

There are two important things in the conclusions. The first is the mention of bilateral talks between the RoC and Turkey, completely dismissing a sovereign aspect for Turkish Cypriot officials and leaders. The second is that the Council took Cyprus as a whole territorial entity without mentioning that, similar to the terrestrial issue, much of the Cypriot EEZ falls under the jurisdiction of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. This lack of recognition of the “Turkish Cypriot Community” was heavily criticized by Turkey. In a press release on the following day, the Foreign Ministry denounced “how prejudiced and biased the EU is with regard to Cyprus as they make no reference to the Turkish Cypriots, who have equal rights over the natural resources of the Island, in total disregard of their existence in Cyprus. These conclusions are the latest examples of how the Greek Cypriot-Greek duo abuse their EU memberships for the sake of their maximalist positions and how other EU countries are instrumental to this end.” (Turkey MFA, 2019).

That is not to say that Turkish Cypriots have not had any presence within EU institutions. As of 2019, one out of the six seats for Cyprus is held by a Turkish Cypriot. Cyprus’ Communist Party member Niyazi Kızılyürek is part of the Left in the European Union. In a letter of inquiry addressed through the European Parliament in October 2020, he denounced the interference of Turkey in Turkish Cypriots’ affairs and asked what the EU could do about it “[i]n view of the fact that Turkish Cypriots are EU citizens” (E-005709/2020). The answer that the European Commission gave disregarded completely one of the two main components of the member’s question. In

reply to his interrogation to what the EU can do to limit Turkish interference in Turkish Cypriots affairs, the Commission briefly mentioned that it stands by the need of “reaching a comprehensive settlement and reunification, and the EU stands ready to play an active role in supporting these negotiations.” As for the opening of the Varosha district, it stressed “the importance of the status of Varosha, as set out in relevant UNSC Resolutions and will continue to be guided by these Resolutions, in particular UNSC Resolutions 550 (1984) and 789 (1992). In this respect, the EU reiterated that full respect of the relevant UNSC Resolutions is crucial and called for the immediate reversal of recent actions.” (E-005709/2020). This clear dissociation to Cypriot domestic affairs is a sharp contrast with the severity and tone it takes when it comes to issues directly linked to gas exploration in the Eastmed and how it takes a highly defensive and offensive tone with regard to Cyprus.

E. The Cyprus reunification talks: finding a place for the EU?

Until the 2017 peace talks between the Greek Cypriots and Turkish counterparts, the European Union did not participate neither as an active member nor as an observer. Prior to that, the EU was merely playing the role of an observer and an add-on to the main protagonists, which were usually the Cypriot leaders, Greek, Turkish and British representatives. When the 2014 talks began in February, the EU Council and Commission issued a statement that “[t]he European Union welcomes the agreement announced today [...] on a Joint Declaration, which lays a solid foundation for resumption of negotiations for a fair and viable comprehensive settlement of the long-standing Cyprus problem. [...] the European Union declared its readiness to accommodate the terms of a settlement in line with the principles on which the Union is

founded. As previously announced, the European Commission is keen to play its part in supporting the negotiations, conducted under UN auspices and to offer all the support the parties and the UN find most useful. [...] In parallel, the European Commission will also step up its efforts to help the Turkish Cypriot Community prepare for implementation of the *acquis*. [...] The European Union stands ready to look creatively at how to contribute to this objective in the prospects of a final settlement.” (EUCO 38/14, 2014).

In January 2017, a conference was held in Geneva dealing with the crisis, it was attended by leading diplomats from Greece, Turkey, Britain, the UN and the EU. The EU delegation was headed by (then) European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker (Ekathimerini, 2017). The EU was present as an observer in this conference and in one following it in June 2017 (UN Report 17-17134, 2017). The talks that ensued were headed by the Cyprus’ two communities’ leaders.

The European Commission Role in the 2015-2017 was significant but not active. It was mainly focused on implementing the *acquis communautaire* in the whole of Cyprus should an agreement be reached, and the presence was more a technical than a political one. According to the report of Secretary General Gutterres that ensued following the collapse of talks, “[o]ne prominent feature of the latest round of talks was the agreement between the sides to enable the European Union to play an enhanced role in the peace process in conjunction with my good offices. That role was further strengthened through the consistent support of the political leadership of the European Union [...] demonstrated by the personal engagement of the President of the European Commission through several visits to the island by high- level European Commission officials and their high-level engagement during the Conference on Cyprus in Geneva

and in Crans-Montana. The Personal Representative of the President of the European Commission to my good offices mission, together with a small team deployed in Cyprus in 2015, remained fully engaged in the process, enabling unprecedented structural integration of the Commission's support into the process under the auspices of the United Nations.” (UN Report [17-17134](#), point 31: 7).

In July 2017, the talks collapsed amid the insistence of Turkey (and the Turkish Cypriots) to keep a certain number of Turkish troops on the island. The resulting outcome was depicted as another step toward “permanent partition” and a miss for its “last chance for reunification” (The Guardian, 2017; The Economist, 2017). Following the collapse of the negotiations, the High Representative/Vice-President Federica Mogherini, answering a question to the press, gave insight on EU's position in the talks. She said “the European Union does not take part to the negotiations on the Cyprus' issue. We are very careful in respecting our role that has to be institutionally very clear. We are observing the negotiations, so we are not part of it, we are not guarantors. We observe it and we support it, and we try to make sure we tried - but I am sure we will continue trying - to make sure that any outcome can be accommodated in the future EU membership of the united island.” (170725_14, 2017).

Following the presidential elections in October 2020 in the TRNC, a joint statement issued by High Representative Borrell and Commissioner Ferreira of the European Commission was released. It called for the “the resumption of negotiations, under the auspices of the United Nations (UN)”, and a “constructive engagement with a view to reaching a comprehensive settlement and reunification”. The report stands the normative views of the EU on a solution to the conflict: “reunification based on a bi-zonal, bi-communal federation, within the UN framework [...], and in line with the

principles on which the EU is founded.” It ended with a reminder that the EU is willing to play a more active role in the conflict settlement (Statement/20/1957, 2020).

On March 6, 2021, the European Union’s foreign policy chief insisted that the bloc was to take part in the planned Cyprus talks that are to be held in Geneva in April 2021 under the auspices of the United Nations (tweet). Moreover, the Greek Cypriot president also underlined that “[t]he EU participation in the new round of negotiations in Geneva, is of utmost importance” (tweet). Turkish Cypriot leader has in response rejected categorically the involvement of the European Union in the next round of talks claiming that “Both Greece and ‘southern’ Cyprus are EU members and expecting the bloc’s impartiality in such a meeting is not realistic” (statement, 2021). He again reiterated what Erdogan had said about the future of the island, describing them as two distinct states.

What can explain the “EU backing for the Greek Cypriots’ insistence on a federal solution, as opposed to a drive by Turkey and the Turkish Cypriots to scrap the decades-old formula and move forward with a deal based on two separate states”, might just be more than oil and gas. Firstly, the new elected president of the TRNC, a staunch supporter of the two-state solution for the island of Cyprus, is a public supporter of Turkish President. This ultimately means that North Cyprus’ administration is under effective control of what Turkey decides and desires, and an added card for Turkey in the rift between the two camps.

Ersin Tatar had “called instead for deeper ties with the Turkish “motherland” and its president Recep Tayyip Erdogan.” (FT, 2020). He had said that “Cyprus [is in fact...] two states living side by side” in an interview (from *ibid.* In contrast with predecessor, who had called for "a sibling relationship, not one of mother and child"

when denouncing Turkey's interference, Tatar claims "[m]otherland Turkey has been with us at all the critical moments," he said. "We cannot exist without Turkish support." (ibid). On Erdogan, Tatar had been called saying he would be following Turkey's president's line to the letter (The National Herald, 2021). Finally, on hydrocarbons, Tatar assured that he would pursue the cooperation with Turkey in TRNC's EEZ. This stance was acknowledged in a March 2021 report by the European Commission, stating "[t]he electoral context led to an increase in polarising rhetoric and provocations, prompting strong reaction from the EU as reflected in Council and European Council conclusions."

What could be said about the EU's hardline stances in supporting the Greek Cypriot desires could easily be classified in terms of "terror equilibrium" with Turkey and the Turkish Cypriot administration under Tatar. Indeed, when TRNC held the 2010 elections and an outright hardliner (similar to Tatar) was declared winner, he decided to retract his position of a confederate or a two-state system. Following his victory, Eroglu announced that he had also become in favor of a federal state.

The TRNC's foreign minister said in an interview to Politico Europe that "[t]he EU has no place at the table" and that it "does not have a positive role to play in the process, it is not a neutral bystander". He also mentioned that the European Union is biased since it hosts not only the Greek Cypriot government, but also Greece. On his vision of a united Cyprus, he stated that he would like to see a "partnership of sovereign equal states" with a confederation instead of a federal state that the international community had been calling to establish (Politico Europe, 2020).

Cyprus understands that the EU's role is to provide an equilibrium in face of Turkey and Turkish Cypriots. This can clearly explain why Cyprus' officials have been

keen to express their support for a role in the next round of talks. Nikos Christodoulides, Cyprus' Foreign Minister wrote on Euractiv that “[t]he EU is an internal actor, and as such the EU must have a seat at the negotiating table this time as well. Given Cyprus’s status as an EU member state, it should be self-explanatory why that is the case, and yet there is resistance [...]” He added that “[it] must have a seat at the negotiating table under UN auspices, also because it proved in the previous round of negotiations that its role is valuable in bridging gaps, and doing so in a way that is compliant with EU law and that ensures functionality.”

On Turkey and Turkish Cypriots’ insistence on refusing it to be part of the talks, he added that “Turkey is pressing for a positive agenda with the EU. If Turkey’s rhetoric on its wish to mend relations with the EU is to be taken seriously, it would be contradictory for Turkey to insist on its position not to have the EU participating in the negotiations under UN auspices. How can Turkey insist on a positive agenda with the EU but object to the EU’s participation in the current effort for resumption of negotiations for a solution to the Cyprus Problem? [...]” (Euractiv, 2021).

In March 2021, the government of the Republic of Cyprus commented on a report prepared by European Commission for the European Council on the “State of play of EU-Turkey political, economic and trade relations” as “totally unacceptable.” (Ekathimerini, 2021). The report has a clearly more conciliatory tone vis-a-vis Turkey than previous reports and signals an attempted rapprochement by the EC to Turkey. Importantly, the report calls on “[s]trengthening our already substantial economic ties is another win-win situation for both sides” and it further calls to expand the width of the current EU-Turkey customs union and revise it. On its handling of the refugee crisis, the report clearly opts for “continued EU support [which] will be required over the next

years” (Report 8 final/2, 2021). The positivity of the report blends with an assertive tone and a clear readiness to take the relationship to a tense state of affairs as it clearly states that if “Turkey [does] not move forward constructively in developing a genuine partnership with the EU, it should be made clear that this would bear political and economic consequences” (ibid).

On Cyprus, the report stated that the EU had observed “[a] number of proposals for confidence building measures [that] have been exchanged among the parties including on the sharing of revenues from the exploitation of hydrocarbons, and the EU continues to stand ready to facilitate the necessary technical work in this regard.” On Turkish Cypriots, it stressed the “[p]ositive outcomes related to practical and vital issues for the [...] community [...] which] could lead to an environment conducive to more trust”. Finally, the report reiterated the centrality of the Cyprus dispute settlement as it is for the EU “sine qua non for easing tensions in the region. [Turkey’s] non-recognition of the Republic of Cyprus continues to lead to the blockage of different paths of cooperation. Normalisation of EU-Turkey relations will remain extremely challenging in the absence of a solution to the Cyprus issue.” (Report 8 final/2, 2021).

This indicator proves that the European Union and Turkey have been playing a tit-for-tat game, with episodes of heightened escalation and prudent de-escalation. Cyprus, it appears, is a negotiating card used mainly by Turkey in this game against the EU. The European Union which still calls for a unified Cyprus would definitely be more at ease knowing Turkey is acting according to international law rather than being confrontational at different levels. In the standoff between Turkey and the EU, the latter is obviously choosing to side with Greek Cypriots as leverage. This is shown with the

growing voices of opposition in the TRNC in regard to the EU taking part in the next round of talks, albeit with the same status of 2017.

What is clear then is the importance of Cyprus as a physical entity for the European Union. The heavily defensive positions of the EU, in parallel to the hardline positions of Turkey in regard to both parts of the island are clear examples of how it has become too important for the former and an important pressure card for the latter. But the EU seems as distant to the Cyprus Question as it has always been. The last decision to take part of the reunification card seems to stem from a need to create balance with a Turkish backed Turkish Cypriot position that is much less open for debate and which can create further problems in the Eastmed discoveries process.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

This thesis has attempted to study whether the centrality and importance of the Cyprus issue has changed for the European Union following the Eastmed Gas Discoveries. From the evidence provided, the main hypothesis stating that the importance of Cyprus for the EU has dramatically increased following the gas discoveries in the Eastern Mediterranean, is challenged. That is, while Cyprus as a physical entity has become a center of interest for its potential resources and transit route for the EU, the Cyprus question itself has kept on being treated the same.

From the onset of the Cypriot crisis, the EU has evidently been unable to meet both sides halfway. The acceptance of the application of Cyprus to the EU without consulting the Turkish Cypriots is one example. The three marking events selected to analyze how the EU considered the Cyprus issue suggest a misunderstanding of the internal dynamics and politics driving the two communities. The harsh stances taken by various EU representatives and European leaders against the Greek Cypriots for having democratically decided not to back the Annan Plan reveal fragility in terms of normative values the EU is expected to defend. They also reveal an inability to discern what matters for the communities most. The EU's counter-declaration to Turkey following the latter's decision not to recognize the Republic of Cyprus in the additional protocol signed with the EU is another example of how the Union fell short of Cypriot expectations. Finally, the EU's handling of the Cypriot economic crisis of 2012/2013 further distanced the Union from both communities who had felt abandoned by the institution at a time of hardship and whose trust on the Union further deteriorated.

Overall, the Union's stances and actions on the Cyprus question prior to the discoveries of oil and gas was not encouraging to reach a settlement.

Following the discovery of natural gas in the region, the European Union was wary not to take harsh stances against Turkey when it had begun to undermine the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the Republic of Cyprus. After initial shy reactions to Turkish actions in Cypriot EEZ, it was not until 2019 that the EU took substantial action against Turkey by imposing sanctions. In the context of the Eastmed Gas Discoveries, it has become apparent that the Cyprus question is an important card used by Turkey as leverage against the bloc consisting of the Eastmed Gas Forum and to which the European Union has expressed support and assistance. From Turkey's end, it appears that the dispute will only be used as fuel for the existing tension on the gas front.

What is therefore sure is that the European Union did revise its positions in regard to Cypriot rights in the RoC's EEZ. The Union has a lot at stake in the Eastmed gas discoveries. From European companies investing in Cypriot waters, to the possibility to maximize energy security and through the provision of additional routes and corridors for European markets, the stakes for the EU are high. It is therefore expected that the Union step in defense of the rights of Cypriots in their territorial waters, notably because it is Turkey and the TRNC that are not abiding by international treaties and customary international law.

The change in stance of the EU toward Cypriot rights might also be traced to a critical aspect of the environment in the Eastmed and to which Cyprus and Greece have played a central role: new alliances. Indeed, with Egypt and Israel becoming the natural allies of both European countries, the EU found itself implicated in this regional

alliance. This would enable it to reassert itself in the region as a soft power via the EastMed Gas Forum. By promoting cooperation, the EU could lure other Eastmed states in its sphere of influence, while keeping Turkish influence at bay. The enthusiasm brought about by the United States to these new alliances might have also affected the EU.

As for what concerns the Cypriot communities and the thorny Cyprus question, the evidence provided suggests that the EU's position in regard to the issue has remained the same. No substantial breakthrough was provided by the European Union. What is sure is that Cyprus had represented a microcosm and perfect example of the physical boundary separating two peoples: the Europeans on one hand and the Turks on the other. That separation was not too problematic until the territorial integrity of Cyprus was put in question following the gas discoveries, which meant that the division, in a physical sense, had now become unbearable.

The Cyprus question clearly reveals the internal struggles that the European Union faces both as an institution and as a group of member states attempting to forge a common vision. The inability of the bloc to solve an issue that is an internal matter and which one of its main aspects concerns of territory belonging *de jure* under its jurisdiction.

The current engagement seems to stem from a "terror equilibrium" against a hardened Turkish/Turkish Cypriot stance instead of an active engagement. The European Union seems to have taken a radical approach to Cypriot EEZ in the wake of turbulent relations to Turkey and in response to Turkish aggression in the Aegean. This explains why some countries more than others actively engage with Cyprus in military operations like France. Cyprus understands this and is making use of this tension to its

advantage. The European Union seeks to diversify its energy portfolio through Cyprus, Israel and Greece, but it is obviously still open to pave the way to Turkish acceptance and cooperation. The cooperative aspect of the Eastmed gas discoveries would clearly have been the best option for the EU if Turkey was ready to cooperate. In that sense, we could have predicted the same attitude by the EU to Cyprus and the need to “sacrifice” it to some extent in order to secure Turkish cooperation.

To conclude, the thorny Cyprus dispute has stood the test of time and the test of unfolding breakthroughs that would have pushed one to make claims about it coming to an end. What is sure is that an institution that has been driven a lot by tactical short term interests and that has failed to grasp what is at stake at a national level for both communities will unfortunately be unable to solve such a meaningful and rooted issue for both communities in the foreseen future. What is more, with an adverse camp that has been using the Cypriot question as a leverage and tactical card as well, the focus has clearly drifted from its internal dynamics. For the time being, it appears that a settlement to the Cyprus dispute is not in the horizon.

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