

Geopolitical Alliances in the Making in the Eastern Mediterranean Region

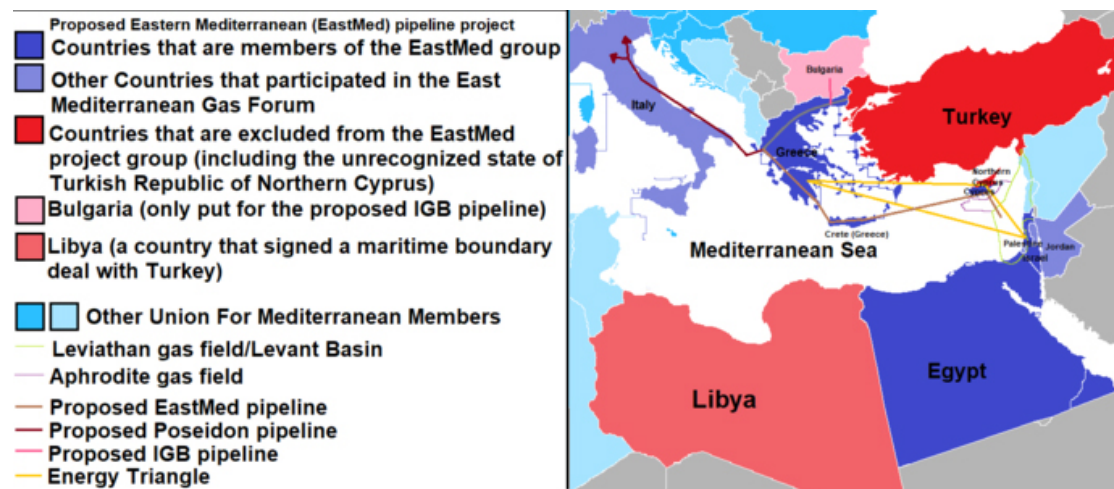
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The Eastern Mediterranean region is in process of “delivering” nascent, loose but formidable, geopolitical alliances that transcend stereotyped political and cultural prototypes throughout western Eurasia. These ones are the outcome of shifting regional power balances, but mostly reflect the United States “Pivot to Asia” policy and resulting Middle East low priority ranking for Washington, ever since President Obama’s second term, as well as the emergence of China’s economic -for the time being- incursion in the wider region.

This is a real change of paradigm for the EastMed area, which is characterized for its “inflammable” nature due to various reasons: First and foremost, the historical ambitions and conflicting assertions of sovereignty in the region. Then, competition over control of natural gas reserves and pipeline politics, civil wars and political chaos in certain littoral states. US retrenchment and Russia’s naval base expansion in Syria, as well as Turkish expansion in Libya, NATO allies divisions and, not to reckon with, waves of migration and refugees.

In fact, historic significance strategic rapprochements take place among Israel, Egypt, United Arab Emirates and Bahrain (possibly soon followed by Saudi Arabia and Oman). The whole picture is complemented by the multiple fields’ geopolitical synergies among France, Greece, Cyprus and the General Khalifa Haftar’s administration in eastern Libya.

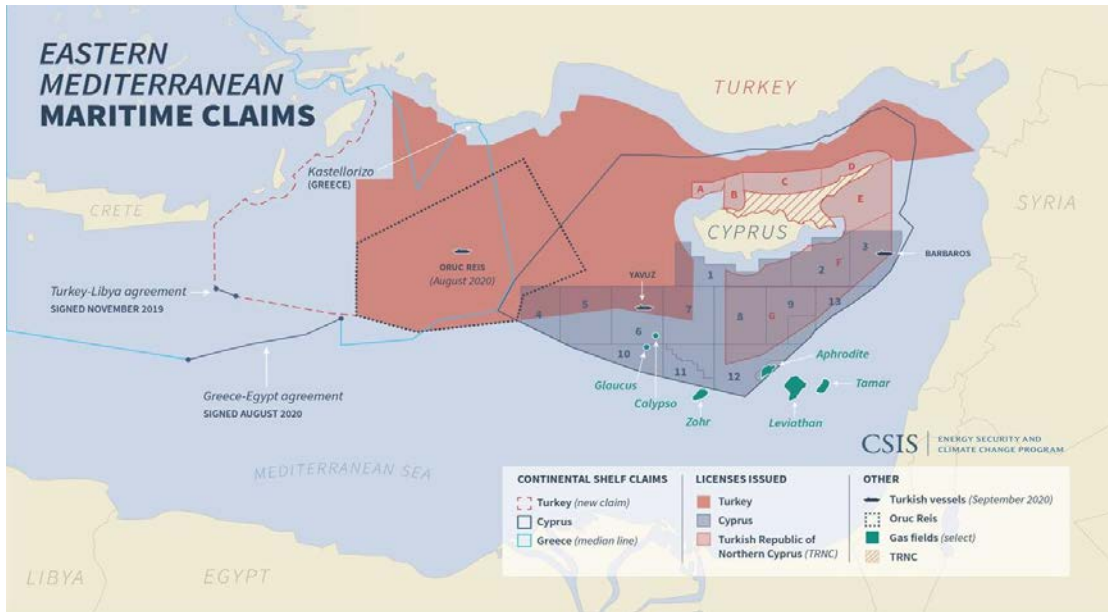
Recently, various acts of rapprochement were manifested by India as well. These developments follow the recent inauguration of the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF) as international organization (16.01.2020), though with Egypt, Israel, Cyprus, Greece, Jordan and the Palestinian Authority amplify the geopolitical spectrum of the trilateral synergies in the region (Israel, Greece, Cyprus - Egypt, Greece, Cyprus - Jordan, Greece, Cyprus).



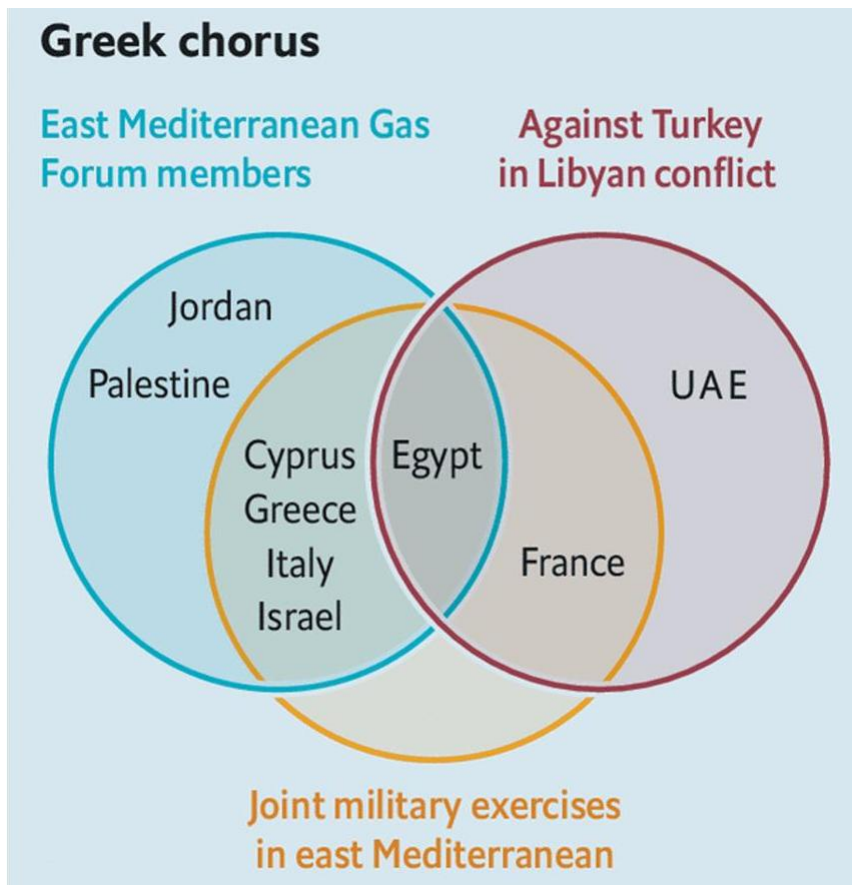
Picture 1: *Conflicting alliances in Eastern Mediterranean, F. W. Engdahl, "The Mad Geopolitics of Israel's EastMed Gas Pipeline", 19.01.2020*

On the opposite site, Turkey multi facet alignment with Qatar and its petroleum industry visions for EastMed hydrocarbon deposits exploitation, run parallel to Ankara's military and sea zones agreements with Libya's Government of National Accord (GNA, Tripoli). Allying itself with GNA permits Ankara to gamble essentially for the geopolitical control of the Mediterranean.

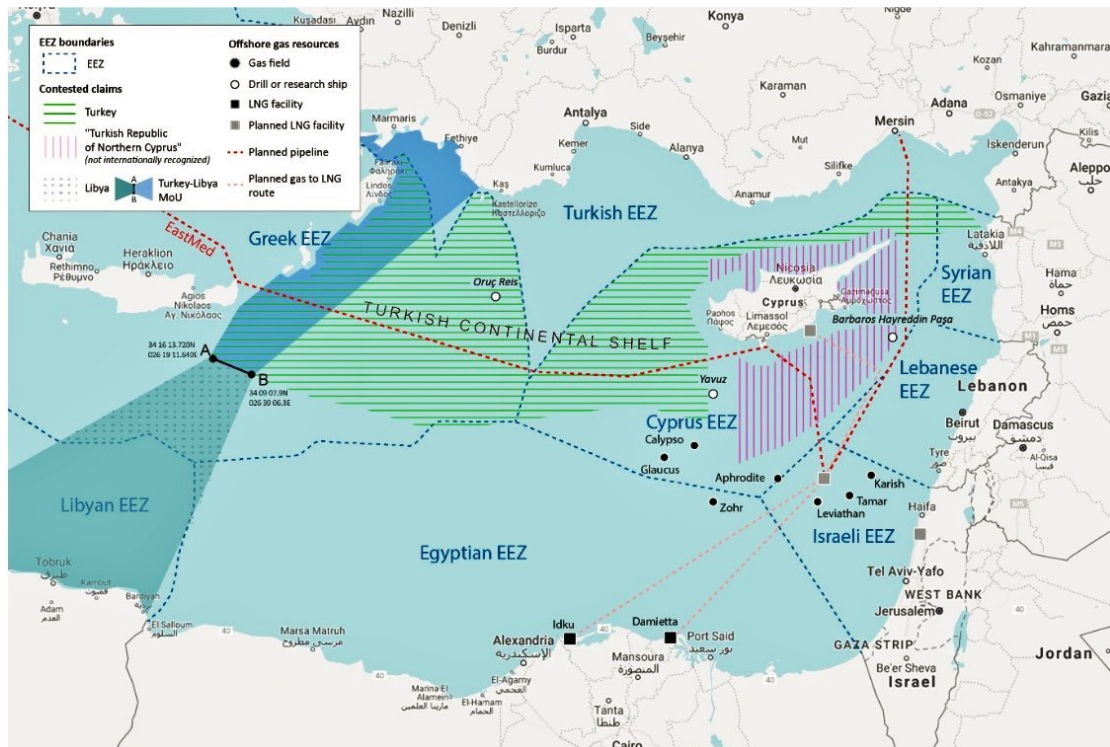
Turkish aggressive practices and machinations in Eastern and Central Mediterranean, in blunt contradiction to International Law of the Sea norms, - pretending to defend the rights of its Turkish-Cypriots affiliates in occupied territories of northern Cyprus to exploit under sea hydrocarbon deposits- are indicative of Turkey policy. In reality, Turkey is instrumentalizing EastMed sub-sea deposits for hiding its nationalistic, imperialist visions labeled "Mavi Vatan" (Blue Homeland), in direct violation of the Republic of Cyprus and Greece's lawful rights.



Picture 2: N. Tsafos, CSIS, August 2020.

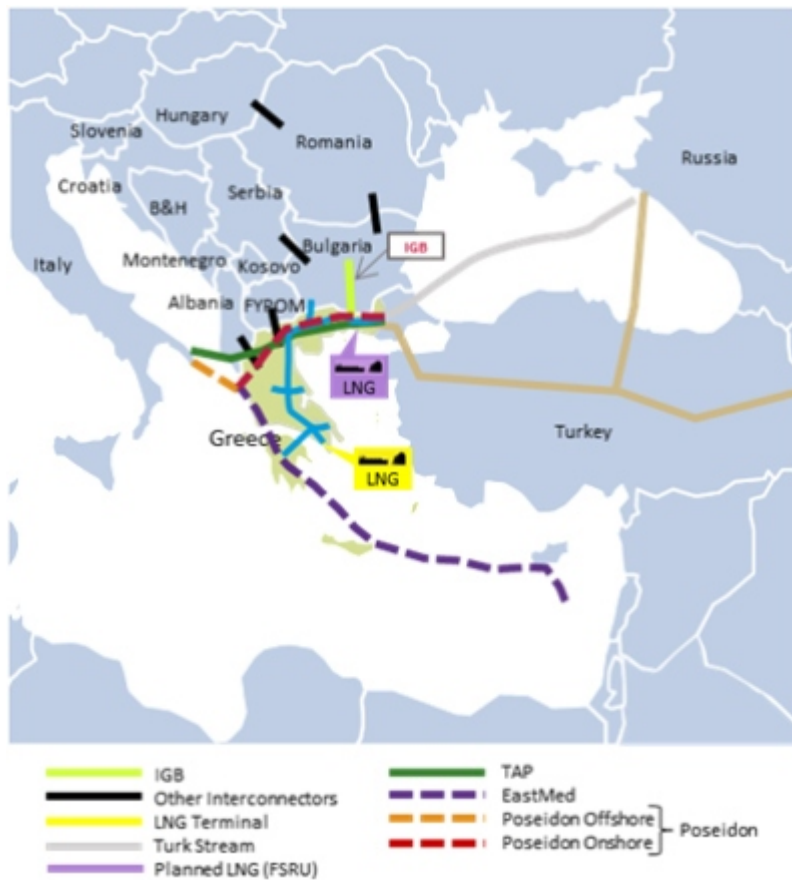


Picture 3: Angst in the Aegean. A row between Turkey and Greece over gas is raising tension in the eastern Mediterranean, *The Economist*, 20.08.2020



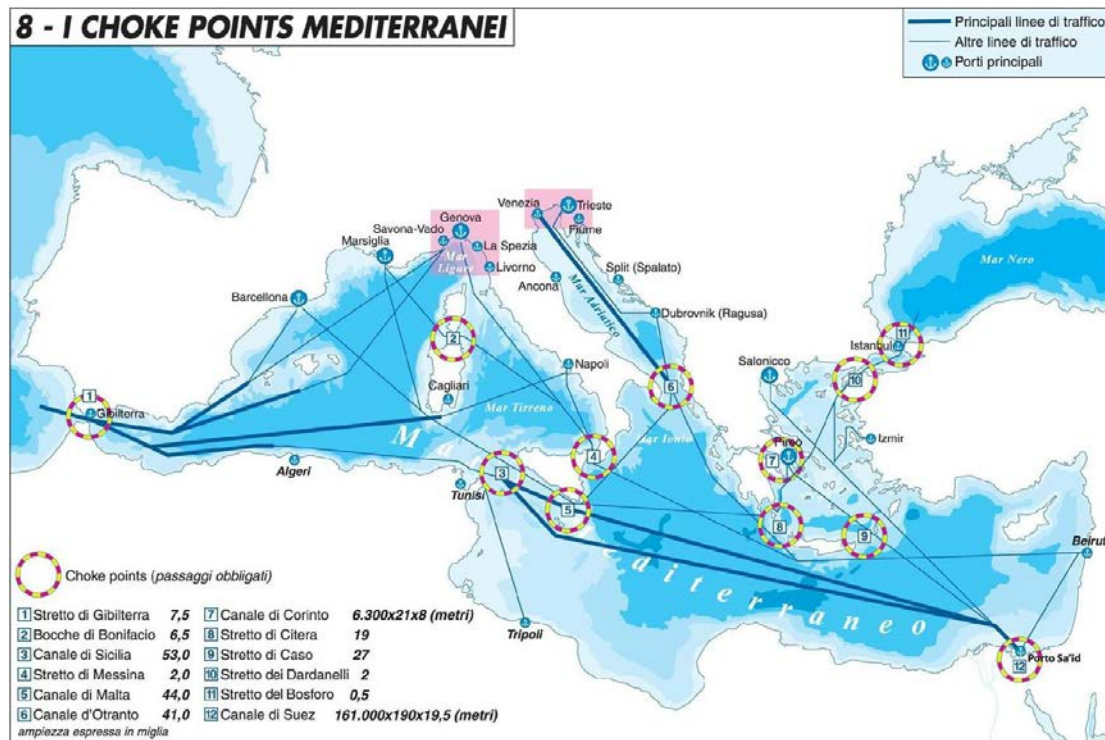
Picture 4: Map by Philippe Morgan de Rivery, based on data from International Energy Agency, Wood Mackenzie, CSIS. Positions of ships as of 3 September 2020, per marinetraffic.com.

Ankara's expansionist policy aims to de facto annulment of the EastMed pipeline project, agreed in early January 2020 by Israel, Cyprus and Greece. Revisionist Turkish pretensions, expressed through aggressive navy practices, combined with Qatar natural gas exports to EU markets revenue losses in case that this project comes to reality, reveal reality. Turkey may be "thirsty" for natural gas for advancing its climate friendly energy transition, but very costly hydrocarbon exploitation in the huge depths of the Eastern Mediterranean, come in sharp contrast with the free of geopolitical animosities Turkey's newly discovered deposits in the Black Sea and, of course, imports from Azerbaijan and Russia.



Picture 5: International Infrastructures, DEPA (www.depa.gr/international-infrastructures/?lang=en).

Turkish imperialism directly affects shipping lanes and energy markets, harassing trade and hydrocarbons transportation in the Suez Canal, Bosphorus, Gibraltar, Bad el Manteb and Hormuz straits, thus damaging European and Western in general interests in the Eastern Mediterranean. Unfortunately, the West is lacking a common position strategy, as the US foreign policy was more or less disengaged from Middle East and Eastern Mediterranean issues ever since Obama was in office.



Picture 6: Choke points in the Mediterranean. Main and secondary traffic lanes and ports, LIMES (www.limesonline.com).

Russia herself, is seeking the geopolitical imperative of securing access to the warm waters of the Eastern Mediterranean ports and global shipping lanes, but is also feeling quite at ease collaborating with Turkey against the entry of EastMed gas to European markets, which will surely deprive her of supremacy there. As for China, Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative is mostly focused to business, although its military presence in the Horn of Africa probably foreshadows aggressive geopolitical presence in the Eastern Mediterranean too.

The EU member states are divided towards Turkish policies; Italy, Spain and Malta are restrained due to military and economic deals with Ankara, as for Germany, having interests invested in Turkey, she tries to mediate between Ankara, Athens and Nicosia. France, for its part, is vexed by Turkish hegemonic moves in Levante and North Africa. Paris geopolitical interests invested in the region and cultural opposition to radical Islam directives professed by the Erdogan regime, drive these countries to political collision. In addition, Erdogan aspiration for leadership among Muslims world wide, and his wish to defend supposedly oppressed ones in European states, collide with the French President Macron's will to subdue Islam institutions to state control. Ironically enough, that's the exact purpose served by the Ataturk policies toward Turkish Islam in the 1930's.

The policy conflict between Turkey and France has religious, ideological and identity overtones, and features the battle between pro-Islamist and anti-Islamist forces. Ankara supports extremist Islamist factions as GNA in Libya, Hamas in Lebanon and Muslim Brotherhood movement in Egypt, and strikes Kurdish forces fighting against the Islamic State (ISIS) in northern Syria. France has banned the Turkish far right nationalist “Grey Wolves” movement in its territory, having greatly suffered lately by Islamic terrorism.

Same views are shared by Israel, coming to realize that it is Turkey the real threat, not Iran, as it seeks to assume the leadership of the Muslim world and revive the Ottoman Empire. Erdogan’s pro-Islamist policy in Syria and Libya and the military support he offers to the Muslim Brotherhood forces there, even employing Syrian Jihadists, has also alarmed Egypt and the UAE. Both countries consider the Turkish interventionism in regional conflicts in pursuit of Ankara’s geopolitical interests in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Red Sea, an existential threat to their international strategies.



Picture 7: Indian Ocean: new center of the world?, (www.diploweb.fr).

As a matter of fact, Turkey military incursion in northern Syria, its military bases in Qatar and Somalia, as well as its goal to establish one in Libya along with the Turkish base in Albania, mark a divisive move toward hegemony and independent of NATO's goals diplomacy, that has not passed unnoticed from all states in the wider Middle East region.

Characteristic of this geopolitical "fever" is Cairo's wish to use the Libyan proxy war, the militarization of the MENA region, and its bitter rift with Ankara, as a tool for establishing an Egyptian geostrategic footprint from the Red Sea to the Horn of Africa. Recent inauguration of a military base on the shores of the Red Sea and the discovery of gas deposits in Egyptian waters, mark the transformation of the Eastern Mediterranean region to a strategic hub between the EU and the Red Sea. The designation of the Indian Ocean as the strategic epicenter of the geopolitical rivalry between US and China, illustrates clearly the importance of this evolution._

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