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Map of the Trans-Anatolian Gas Pipeline (the central part of the Southern Gas Corridor, which connects the giant Shah Deniz gas field in Azerbaijan to Europe through the South Caucasus Pipeline and the Trans Adriatic Pipeline).

Source: Golden, Own Work, via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Trans-Anatolian_gas_pipeline.png, Attribution: CC-BY-SA-4.0 | Self-published work | Maps by Golden

Turkey Central To Reducing Europe's Dependence on Russian Natural Gas

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OE Watch Commentary

The two excerpted articles suggest that Europe could reduce or eliminate its dependence on Russian natural gas by using possible alternatives from the Middle East via Turkey. The first article from Turkey's state-owned news agency, *Anadolu Ajansı*, looks at a potential Turkey-Israeli natural gas pipeline that would pump Eastern Mediterranean gas reserves to Europe. Israeli President Isaac Herzog revived this idea during his visit to Ankara in early March 2022. Accordingly, the article states that the issue was on both Turkey's and Israel's agenda. Turkish President Erdoğan reportedly signaled that the sides would continue to work to determine concrete steps on proposed routes.

The excerpted article from security news site *al-Monitor* explores the option of Europe importing natural gas from the Kurdistan Region of Iraq via Turkey. It warns that this will likely increase the rivalry between Turkey and Iran, as Iran would perceive it as a threat to its energy market. On

13 March, Iranian missiles struck Erbil and one target was the villa of a Kurdish businessman involved in the Kurdish region's energy sector. The article notes that a key trigger for the strikes was a plan to pump Kurdish natural gas into Turkey and Europe with the help of Israel. The article refers to several statements made by both Kurdish and Turkish officials indicating such plans. For example, President of the Kurdistan Region Masrour Barzani said on 28 March that the region would "become a net exporter of gas to the rest of Iraq, Turkey, and Europe in the near future and help meet their energy security needs." President Erdoğan also stated that Turkey was gearing up for new energy projects.

“Potential projects to carry Iraqi Kurdistan natural gas to Europe via Turkey, in order to reduce dependency on Russia, might also increase rivalry between Turkey and Iran.”

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Continued: Turkey Central To Reducing Europe's Dependence on Russian Natural Gas

Source: Haydar Oruç, “Türkiye-İsrail normalleşmesinin enerji boyutu (Energy Dimension of Turkey-Israel Normalization),” *Anadolu Ajansı* (Turkey's state-owned news agency), 11 March 2021. <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/analiz/turkiye-israil-normallesmesinin-enerji-boyutu/2531776>

Undoubtedly, the issue that comes to the fore at first glance is energy cooperation...

...after the Russian invasion of Ukraine the issues experienced in energy supply, Europe feels the need to reduce its dependence on Russian energy supply. And this reality puts Eastern Mediterranean gas one step ahead of other alternatives.

When the [EastMed Pipeline] project is implemented, first of all, Turkey's energy supply will be diversified... Iran, which has supplied most of Turkey's energy needs previously, being subjected to international sanctions complicates the sustainability of the gas its gas supplies... In addition, Iran's desire to use gas as a political tool from time to time also harms relations.

Similarly, recent international sanctions on Russia makes its [energy] source unsustainable. Therefore, the emergence of Eastern Mediterranean gas as an alternative source is extremely important in terms of energy security. This will increase the importance and value of Turkey in the energy market.

...if Turkey and Israel reach an agreement for the delivery of Eastern Mediterranean gas to Europe via Turkey, energy supplies will be diversified, energy routes will be secured...

Source: “Erdoğan: Turkey-Israel Gas pipeline on the agenda,” *Yetkin Report* (blog of veteran Turkish Journalist Murat Yetkin), 31 March 2022. <https://yetkinreport.com/en/2022/03/31/erdogan-turkey-israel-gas-pipeline-on-the-agenda/>

Is Turkey-Israel gas pipeline project on the agenda as an alternative to Russian streams? Erdoğan answered Turkish journalist's questions on March 33... stating that a gas pipeline crossing through Turkey is on the agenda.

“We discussed many issues in detail with Mr. Herzog, especially the energy issue. In the past, there were some relations, contacts between Israel and Turkey regarding energy... Laying pipes under the sea from Israel to Greece, to Europe, is not a feasible thing to do. As a result of the cost calculations, it is seen that the most suitable way for this is [the passage] of this natural gas [pipeline] through Turkey. Of course, they are already making assessment on the issue...”

Erdoğan added that he proposed a bilateral meeting between Ministers of Foreign Affairs, and Energy and Natural Resources to discuss the energy issue in detail, and said that Israeli President's response was positive on this proposal...

“...the cooperation between Israel and Turkey here will accelerate the process related to Eastern Mediterranean oil and natural gas. I am very hopeful about this,” [Erdoğan] said.

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Continued: Turkey Central To Reducing Europe's Dependence on Russian Natural Gas

Source: Fehim Taştekin, “Ukraine war shakes up Turkey's ties with both Russia and NATO,” *al-Monitor* (globally read security news site with regionally based reporting), 08 April 2022. <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2022/04/will-renewed-interest-iraqi-kurdish-gas-fuel-turkey-iran-rivalry>

Potential projects to carry Iraqi Kurdistan natural gas to Europe via Turkey, in order to reduce dependency on Russia, might also increase rivalry between Turkey and Iran.

...a potential plan to carry Iraqi Kurdish gas through Turkey with the help of Israel was one reason for Iran's missile attack on Erbil on March 13.

...Under an energy cooperation deal between Ankara and Iraqi Kurdistan in 2013, Turkey has already finished the pipeline linking its border with northern Iraq to a conduit which carries Azeri gas to Europe.

...

Erbil has amped up its efforts to boost its energy ties with regional actors amid escalating tensions between Russia and the Western capitals over Ukraine. Iraqi Kurdistan President Nechirvan Barzani met with Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Ankara on Feb. 2. Ali Hama Salih, the head of the energy commission in Kurdistan's parliament, said Feb. 9 that the gas link to Turkey would become operational in 2025. ...Most recently, [KRG Prime Minister] Masrour Barzani announced Mar 28 that Iraqi Kurdistan would “become a net exporter of gas to the rest of Iraq, Turkey and Europe in the near future and help meet their energy security needs...”

While echoing previous assertions that Israel has no involvement in the plans, Barzani also admitted that Iraqi Kurdistan's expanding energy ties were not in line with Iranian interests...

In a similar vein, Erdogan said Turkey was gearing up for new energy projects. On his way back from Brussels, where he met with various NATO leaders, he told reporters, “God willing, through our meetings new avenues will be opened for Turkey in the energy field.” That hints at possible markets for Iraqi Kurdish and Eastern Mediterranean gas following normalization of ties with Israel.

...But Ankara still has to find a middle ground between Erbil and Baghdad to advance its gas and oil cooperation with Iraqi Kurdistan.