



Disputes over Natural Gas Exploration in the Eastern Mediterranean

OE Watch Commentary: The discovery of hydrocarbon reserves and drilling in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea has escalated tensions between Turkey, Greek Cypriots and other coastal governments. On 9 February 2018 the Turkish Navy halted the work of a drilling ship which was licensed by the Greek Cypriot administration to explore hydrocarbon reserves south of Cyprus. The accompanying passages from Turkish and Middle Eastern sources shed light on this rising tension, especially between Turkey and Cyprus in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea.

The first passage from *Al-Monitor*, a news website with analysts from the Middle East, states that the Turkish General Staff issued a statement on 14 February saying they are conducting surveillance missions in the Eastern Mediterranean as part of Turkey's ongoing maritime security protocol to provide safety for oil transportation and to deter potential threats. According to the author, the day before the Turkish standoff, ENI--the Italian drilling company which the Greek Cypriot government had contracted, announced the discovery of lean gas in Block 6, off the coast of Cyprus. The article claims that there is a natural gas alliance between Greece, Cyprus, Israel and Egypt in the Eastern Mediterranean and that Turkey perceives members of the alliance being aware of the limits of its military. Those perceived limits are due to purges following the July 2016 coup attempt, Turkey's military engagement in Syria, and its increasing isolation in the region. ENI ceased its exploration and moved its drilling ship from the Eastern Mediterranean. According to the author, escalation of the situation will depend on whether Turkey will deploy its recently purchased Deepsea Metro II drilling ship to the Eastern Mediterranean accompanied by the Turkish Navy, which will be an indicator "that Ankara defines the crisis as a military problem."

The second passage is also from *Al-Monitor* and written by the same author as a follow-up on the issue. In his article entitled, "Eastern Mediterranean starting to resemble disputed South China Sea," the author argues that natural gas drilling is impacting power dynamics in the Eastern Mediterranean not only between Turkey and Cyprus, but also among coastal neighbors such as Lebanon, Israel, and Egypt. It states that while the crisis between Turkey and Cyprus is becoming militarized, there are also growing tensions between Egypt and Turkey over the disputed Exclusive Economic Zone.

The third passage, from the Turkish-language daily newspaper *Milliyet*, notes that natural gas reserves have become a source of tension and dispute not only between "Turkish Cyprus" and "Greek Cyprus," but also between Turkey, Greece and even the European Union. Turkey is the only country in the world that recognizes sovereignty of "Turkish Cyprus." According to the author, tension has escalated to the level of risking a conflict. The article states that the reason for this situation is the Greek administration disregarding the views and wishes of Turkish Cypriots and bringing in foreign companies and countries for exploration, while ignoring Turkish Cypriots when declaring an exclusive economic zone. This attitude has led Turkey to take military measures to prevent the drilling activities initiated by Cyprus. **End OE Watch Commentary (Gunduz)**

Source: Metin Gurcan, "Tempers flare over gas exploration in Mediterranean," *Al-Monitor*, 15 February 2018. <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2018/02/turkey-major-crisis-in-eastern-mediterranean-is-nearing.html>

[T]he first hot military standoff of 2018 started Feb. 9 between the Turkish navy and the Saipem 12000 drilling ship of Italy's ENI SpA, which is licensed by the Greek Cypriot administration to explore hydrocarbon reserves south of the island. As the Saipem 12000 was sailing from the area known as Block 6 southwest of the island toward Block 3, Turkish naval vessels approached within 5 miles of it. The Saipem 12000 halted some 15 nautical miles from its destination in Block 3, an area 70 kilometers (43 miles) off the coast of Cape Greco on the southeastern tip of the island.

On Feb. 8, just a day before the reported standoff, ENI announced it had made a lean (residual) gas discovery in Block 6 off Cyprus. According to ENI, the well — which was drilled in water 2,074 meters (1.3 miles) deep, reaching a final total depth of 3,827 meters (2.4 miles) — has excellent reservoir characteristics.

The Turkish naval detachment that blocked Saipem 12000 has been in the region for about three months...

...Ankara feels the natural gas alliance of Greece, Greek Cypriots, Israel and Egypt — being aware of the Turkish military's capacity shortcomings since the July 2016 coup attempt, its military involvement in Syria and its increasing isolation — is scheming for diplomatic, economic and military faits accomplis...

Actually, to understand whether Ankara will escalate the situation, we also have to keep an eye on the Diliskelesi Port near Istanbul, where Turkey's recently purchased Deepsea Metro II drilling ship is still moored after arriving at the beginning of January... If Turkish naval elements accompany the ship to the eastern Mediterranean Sea, that will be a strong indicator that Ankara defines the crisis as a military problem.

Source: Metin Gurcan, "Eastern Mediterranean starting to resemble disputed South China Sea," *Al-Monitor*, 13 March 2018. <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2018/03/turkey-mediterranean-resembling-south-china-sea.html>

The eastern Mediterranean Sea has become a very busy place, and pressure abounds among coastal neighbors there. Governments are declaring exclusive economic zones (EEZs), but they overlap. States are granting duplicate licenses for natural gas exploration and drilling. Mammoth energy corporations and coastal states are signing hundreds of millions of dollars' worth of hydrocarbon agreements. Frequent maritime safety broadcasts are informing of endless military exercises.

Israel and Lebanon are on edge over hydrocarbon reserves. Lebanon awarded bids last month to France's Total SA, Italy's Eni SpA and Russia's Novatek to drill for oil and gas in Blocks 4 and 9 within Lebanon EEZ Israel doesn't recognize these bids and claims that all of Block 9 is within its EEZ.

Then there is the crisis between Turkey and Greek Cyprus, which is becoming progressively militarized.

(continued)



Continued: Disputes over Natural Gas Exploration in the Eastern Mediterranean

“The Turkish naval detachment that blocked Saipem 12000 has been in the region for about three months.”

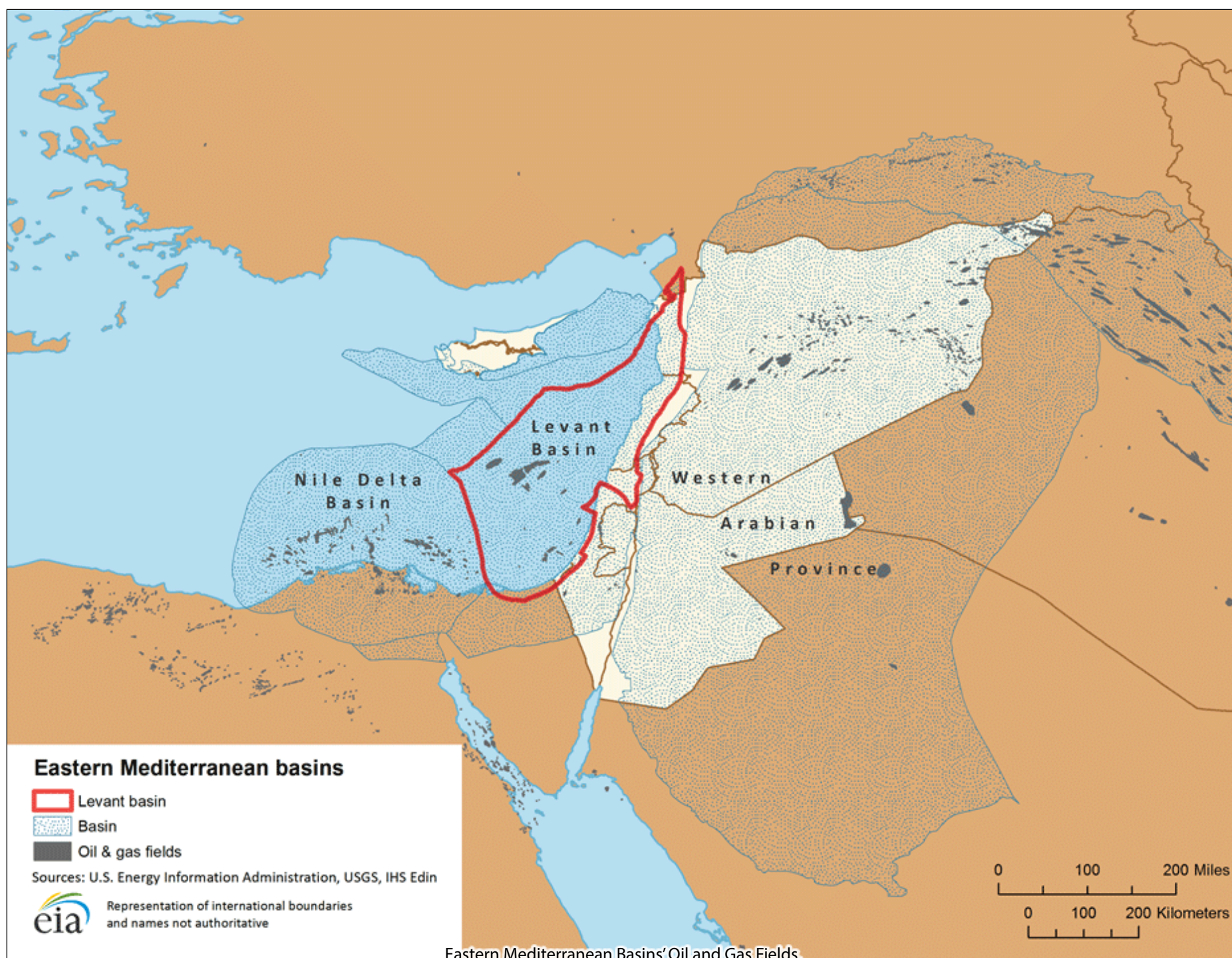
Source: Sami Kohen, “Dogu Akdeniz Krizi ve AB (Eastern Mediterranean Crisis and EU),” *Milliyet*, 27 March 2018. <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/yazarlar/sami-kohen/dogu-akdeniz-krizi-ve-ab-2635144/>

The energy reserves in the waters have become a source of tension and dispute between the parties.

Recently, this issue not only has brought two communities on the island, the Greeks and Turks into tension, but has also caused a European Union and Turkish face off. So much so that the escalating tension has now created the danger of a hot battle on the open sea...

The most important reason leading to this situation is undoubtedly the one-sided act of the Greek Cypriot administration, without taking into consideration the views and wishes of the Turkish side, reaching agreements with foreign companies and countries for search activity, and ignoring the Turkish side when declaring an exclusive economic zone.

This attitude has resulted in the Turkish military interfering to prevent Greek drilling activities. Therefore, the sudden warming of the waters in the Eastern Mediterranean has led to this issue becoming international.



Source: By U.S. Energy Information Administration (eia) [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Eastern_Mediterranean_basins_including_Levent_basin_and_oil_and_gas_fields.png.