



Potential Turkish, Russian and Chinese Cooperation in the Eastern Mediterranean



Known oil and gas fields in the Levant Basin, 2013.

Source: US Energy Information Administration via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Levant_Basin.png#/media/File:Levant_Basin.png, Public domain

OE Watch Commentary: Turkey's relations with China and Russia have been expanding. To remain relevant in Syria, Turkey heavily relies on Russia. As its economy takes a downturn, it has sought Chinese credit and investment. Now as power rivalries and tensions intensify in the Eastern Mediterranean over natural gas discovery, media reports and statements from Turkish and Russian officials indicate the possibility of an alliance in the Eastern Mediterranean between Turkey, Russia and China. The accompanying excerpted articles argue that this emerging alliance will tilt the balance of power in the Eastern Mediterranean in Turkey's favor.

According to the first article, state owned Turkish Petroleum Corporation (TPAO), responsible for exploring and managing Turkey's natural gas and petroleum, has held talks with Chinese and Russian petroleum companies. The Russian Minister of Energy also signaled the possibility of Russian-Turkish cooperation in the region. The article claims that Turkish, Russian, and Chinese cooperation will probably increase for various reasons. Turkey needs the support of both countries against the anti-Turkey alliance loosely formed by littoral states such as the Republic of Cyprus, Greece, Israel, Egypt, Italy and Jordan. Russia intends to control any attempts to create alternatives to its

natural gas pipelines to European markets. For China, controlling the Eastern Mediterranean is important in terms of logistics, supply routes, security and energy security as its One Road One Belt Initiative involves routes cutting through this region to Europe. In the past, China and Russia held joint naval drills in the Mediterranean Sea to show the strength of Russian and Chinese rapprochement.

The second article also points out the Russian Minister of Energy Novak's statement regarding a Russian-Turkish alliance in the region and possible joint natural gas exploration between TPAO, Russian and Chinese companies. It states that an alliance with Russia and China provides leverage to Turkey over other players in this power competition. The article notes that while Russian state-owned Rosneft partnered with Egypt to engage in natural gas drilling in the Egypt Exclusive economic zone in the Mediterranean, it avoided a partnership with the Republic of Cyprus to avoid jeopardizing cooperation with Turkey. **End OE Watch Commentary (Gündüz)**

“China and Russia are aware of the importance of the Eastern Mediterranean for their future.”

Source: Güray Alpar, “Doğu Akdeniz’deki Büyük Oyunda Dengeler Değişecek (Balances Will Change in the Great Game in the Eastern Mediterranean),” *Stratejik Düşünce Enstitüsü [Institute of Strategic Thinking, Turkey]*, 28 July 2019. <https://www.sde.org.tr/guray-alpar/genel/dogu-akdenizdeki-buyuk-oyunda-dengeler-degisecek-kose-yazisi-10642>

In recent years cooperation between Turkey, Russia and China has been gradually developing. Without a doubt, this includes energy sources in the Eastern Mediterranean. It is known that Turkish Petroleum has held talks with Chinese and Russian companies on this issue. In this respect, the Russian Minister of Energy's statement signaling cooperation with Turkey in the Eastern Mediterranean is quite important.

... Russian Minister of Energy said... “From a trade perspective, if there are projects benefiting all parties, Russian companies will cooperate with Turkey.”

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China and Russia are aware of the importance of the Eastern Mediterranean for their future.

Having control of this region, which also controls access to the Suez Canal and the Middle East, [could] restrict [activities of] China and Russia in the region. Access to the Eastern Mediterranean and Red Sea will allow China to access long term energy resources, as well as create an alternative space to undermine Russia's position in the energy equation... Therefore, this struggle, which we call the “Eastern Mediterranean Energy Challenge” will surely occupy the agenda for a longer time.

Source: Gökhan Güler, “Türkiye, AB ve Rusya’nın Son Süreçteki Doğu Akdeniz Politikası (Turkey, EU and Russia’s latest Eastern Mediterranean policy),” *Türkiye Uluslararası İlişkiler ve Stratejik Analizler Merkezi [Turkish Center for International Relations and Strategic Analysis]*, 15 August 2019. <http://turksam.org/turkiye-ab-ve-rusyanin-son-surecteki-dogu-akdeniz-politikasi>

The positive relations between Turkey, Russia and China are regarded as an alternative outlet for a blockaded Turkey. In this regard, the Russian Minister of Energy Novak signaling a cooperation with Turkey in the Eastern Mediterranean contains an extremely important and critical message for the future.

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Russia is not in the Greek EEZ [Exclusive Economic Zone], but it is in the Egyptian EEZ with the Russian state company Rosneft. It seems like Russia have not participated in the deals with the Greeks so as not to disturb Turkey. This is extremely important and cannot be ignored.