

No 1 | April 15, 2021

Analysis

Geopolitical Alliances in the Making in the Eastern Mediterranean Region



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The Eastern Mediterranean region is in process of 'delivering' 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 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 administration in eastern Libya. Recently, various acts of rapprochement were manifested by India as well.

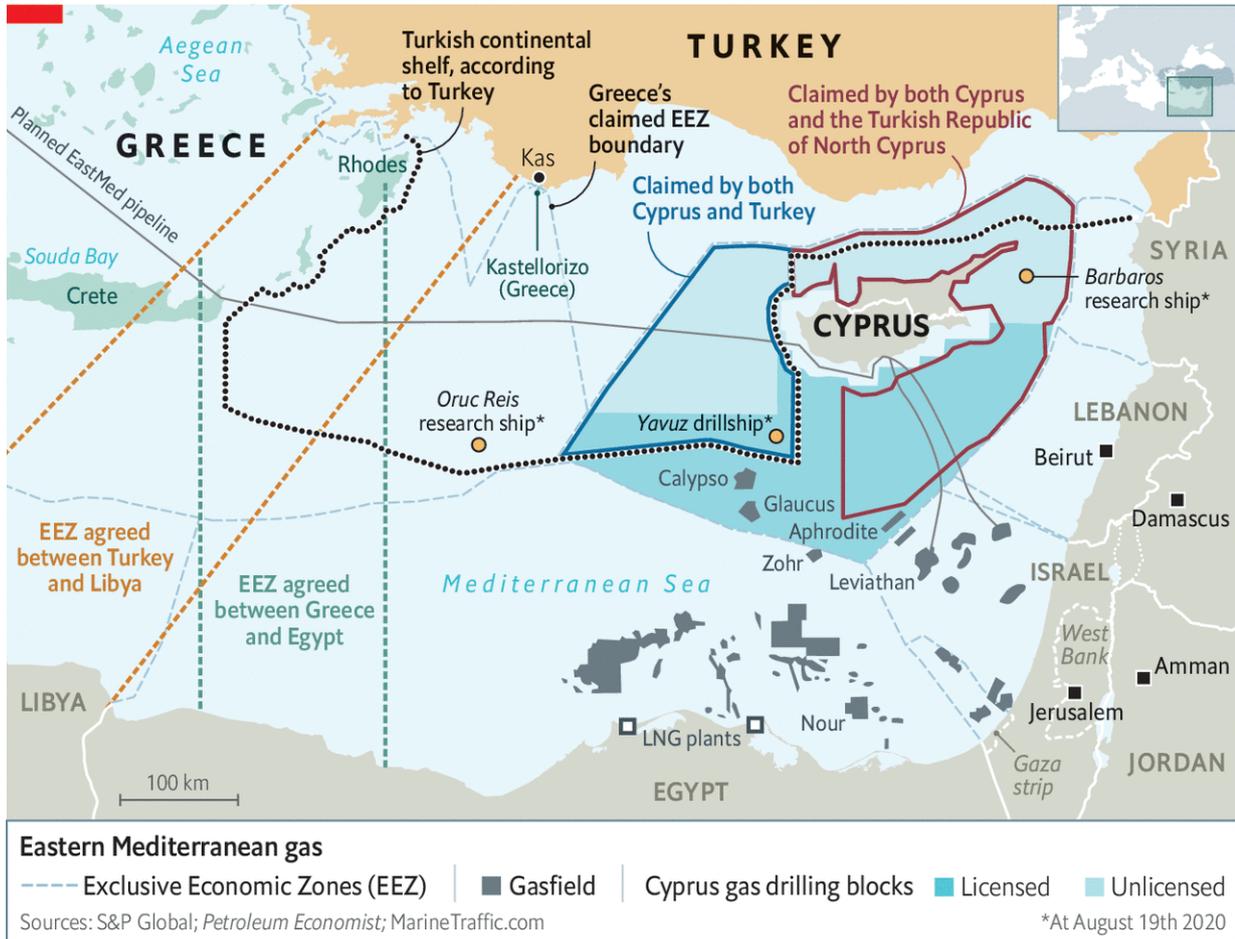


Picture 1: *Conflicting alliances in Eastern Mediterranean, F. W. Engdahl, 'The Mad Geopolitics of Israel's EastMed Gas Pipeline', 19.01.2020*

On the opposite camp, 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 Government of National Accord (GNA, Tripoli). Allying itself with GNA permits Ankara to gamble essentially for the geopolitical control of the Mediterranean.

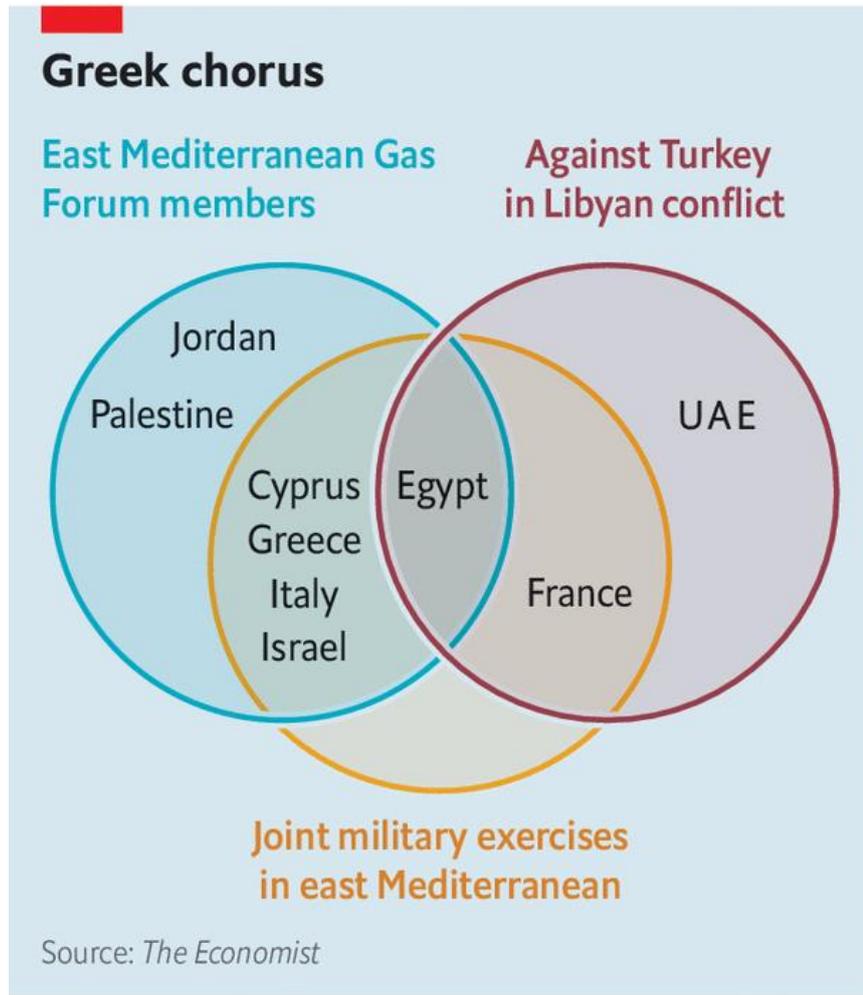
Turkish aggressive practices and machinations in Eastern and Central Mediterranean, in blunt contradiction to International Law of the Sea norms, pretending to defend the rights

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 instrumentalising EastMed sub-sea deposits for hiding its nationalistic, imperialist and hegemonic visions labeled 'Mavi Vatan' (Blue Homeland), in direct violation of the Republic of Cyprus and Greece's lawful rights.



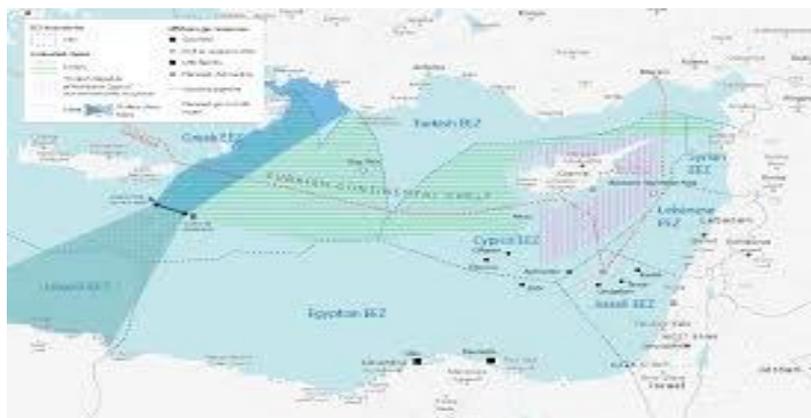
The Economist

Picture 2: 'Angst in the Aegean. A row between Turkey and Greece over gas is raising tension in the eastern Mediterranean', The Economist, 20.08.2020



The Economist

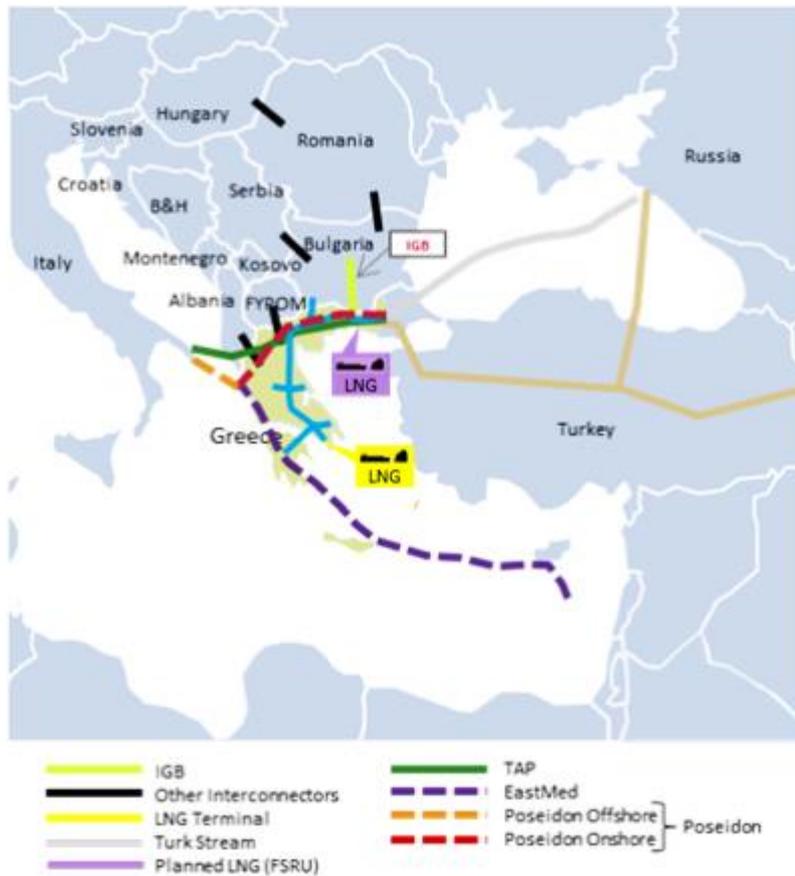
Picture 3: 'Angst in the Aegean. A row between Turkey and Greece over gas is raising tension in the eastern Mediterranean', *The Economist*, 20.08.2020



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.

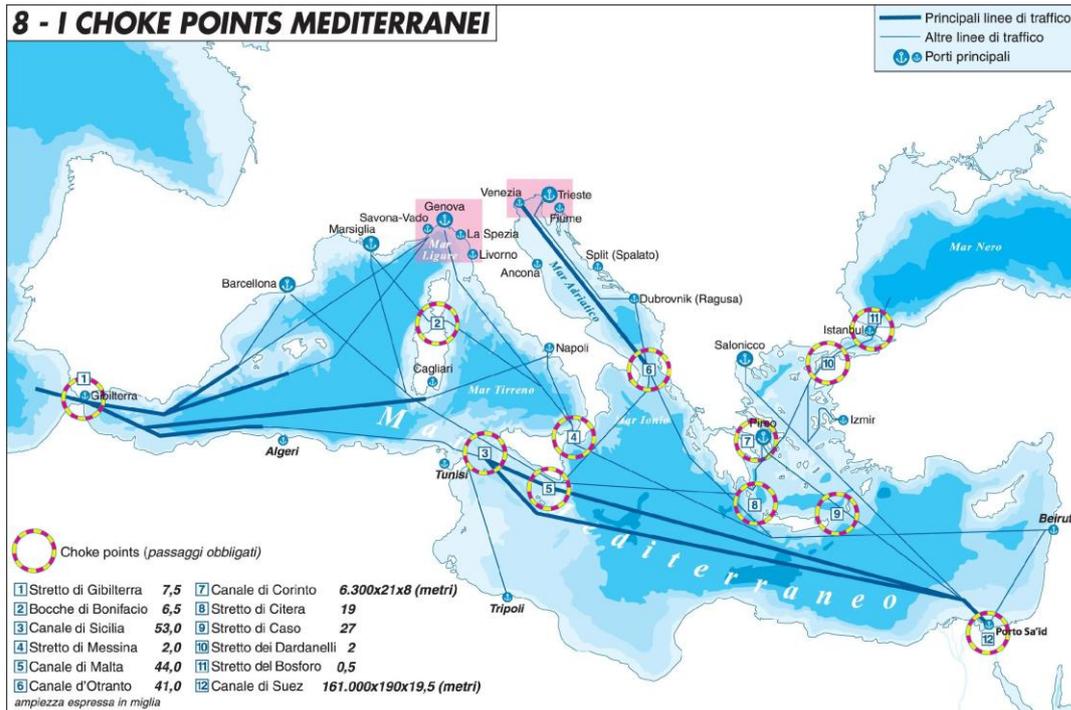
Ankara’s expansionist policy aims to de facto annulment of the EastMed pipeline project, agreed in early January 2020 by Israel, Cyprus and Greece. Revisionist Turkish pretensions, expressed through aggressive navy practices, combined with Qatar natural gas exports to

EU markets revenue loses -in case that this project comes to reality-, reveal Turkish true strategy. 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, contradict free from geopolitical animosities Turkey’s newly discovered deposits in the Black Sea and, no doubt, 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 President Obama was in office for his second term.



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 (OBOR) is mostly focused to business, although its military presence in the Horn of Africa probably foreshadows aggressive presence in the 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 business and military armament interests' invested in Turkey (as well as numerous double citizenship electoral clientele), she tries to mediate between Ankara, Athens and Nicosia, being overtly threatened by Turkey with a new migrants 'invasion' in EU. Nevertheless, Europe, willingly or not, evolves smoothly to a geopolitically acting entity, setting long term geostrategic goals, -a process likely to accelerate in the aftermath of 2022 German elections-.

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 geopolitical collision. In addition, Erdogan aspiration for leadership among Sunni Muslims word 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 was the exact purpose serving the Ataturk policy 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, while standing firmly against Islamism, fearing her culturally divided society's 'explosion'.

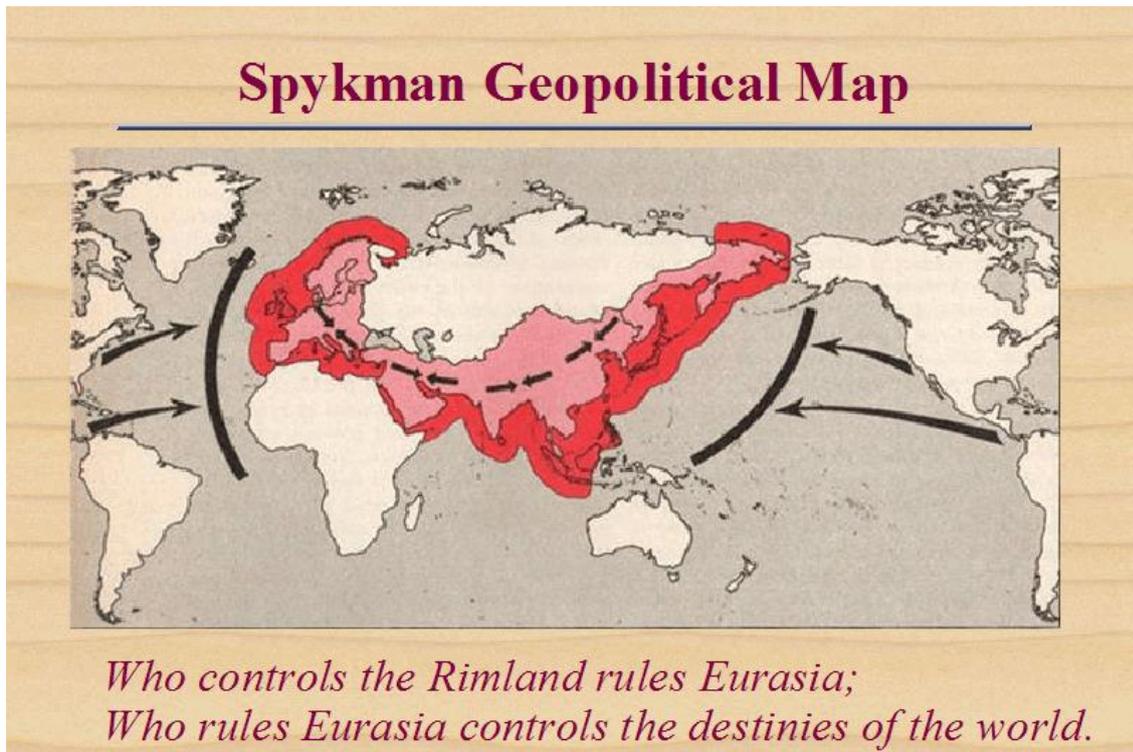
Same views are shared by Israel, coming to realize that it is Turkey the real threat not Iran, as it seeks to assume the leadership of the Muslim world and revive the Ottoman Empire, possibly in geoeconomic terms. Erdogan's pro-Islamist policy in Syria and Libya and the military support he offers to 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, as an existential threat to their international strategies.

As a matter of fact, Turkey military incursion in northern Syria, purchase of Russian arms, 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 decisive move toward hegemony establishment in western Eurasia and independent of NATO's goals diplomacy. Ankara foreshadows creating, along with Turkic post Soviet states in Central Asia, an interspace between wider West and China, aspiring to mediate between them as a separate pole in the emerging international environment of the 21st century.

This strategy 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 political 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.



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



Picture 8: Nicolas J. Spykman, 'The Geography of Peace', 1944

The Hellenic Republic synergy with mutually sharing interests countries from France, Israel and UAE (possibly Saudi Arabia) to India -possibly more actively embraced by the new President Biden administration-, as opposed to Turkish plans, will be the linchpin of a major

high strategy of the West to contain the 21st century new land power, China, from dominating Eurasia's Rimland from the South China Sea, along the Indian ocean, to the Mediterranean. In this regard, US determination to limit Ankara's close cooperation with Beijing within the OBOR scheme, and Moscow's reactivation in EastMed and western Balkans, will be crucial for re-inventing NATO's role in the multi-polar new global power system.-

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IENE - ANALYSIS - Issue No. 1 – April 15, 2021 – ISSN:179-9163

Analysis is published by the INSTITUTE OF ENERGY FOR SOUTH-EAST EUROPE (IENE)

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