This study analyzes Turkey’s Eastern Mediterranean policy and tries to define the priorities and dimensions of the geopolitical struggle in the Eastern Mediterranean as a response to recent approaches to reduce the definition and frame of Turkey’s Eastern Mediterranean policy. Turkey’s Eastern Mediterranean policy cannot be confined exclusively to the Greece-Turkey relations, Cyprus, the concept of “Blue Homeland”, or the hydrocarbon reserves. The study opposes such a reduction of it and asserts that the Turkey’s Eastern Mediterranean policy should be addressed from a broader perspective which includes all of the above, but is not limited to them. The study explains the purview of Turkey’s Eastern Mediterranean policy and, in this framework, discusses the pillars on which it should be founded. An analytical frame for Turkey’s Eastern Mediterranean strategy is presented by setting forth its aims, objectives, and the policies that have been implemented to date.
TURKEY’S EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN POLICY
A GEOPOLITICAL ASSESSMENT
FERHAT PİRİNÇÇİ

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The year 2020 has been a year of intense geopolitical struggle and tension in the Eastern Mediterranean. Countries in the region and non-regional actors who think they have interests in the Eastern Mediterranean have struggled with the local, regional, and global effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, on the one hand, and on the other, have tried to gain a position, make new gains, or preserve their gains in the geopolitical struggle in the Eastern Mediterranean.

The contest in the Eastern Mediterranean is taking place in a multitiered framework. These tiers may be classified into three groups: The first is the determination of the sea borders in accordance with the desires of the relevant actors. The second is the possession or extraction of energy reserves in relation to maritime boundaries and the delivery of extracted products to the markets. The third is the motivation to create a sphere of influence and protect the existing spheres in the regional and global power struggle. The three layers seem closely intertwined and therefore, a change in any has the potential to affect the other layers as well.

As one of the leading actors in this regional geopolitical struggle, Turkey has its own interests that arise across all three tiers. Since Turkey is inevitably affected by either positive or negative changes, the country struggles on all tiers and participates in all as a critical player. However, the scope and sides of this contest may differ in each tier. In other words, Turkey might be confronted with different actors on maritime boundaries, in energy competition, and in the regional or global power struggle. In this sense, the challenges that occur with respect to the
scope of the relationship vary in each tier. That means, it is imperative for Turkey to reinforce its Eastern Mediterranean policy by different means, and plan and implement it in a dynamic, comprehensive, and multidimensional manner.

This study analyzes Turkey’s Eastern Mediterranean policy and tries to define the priorities and dimensions of the geopolitical struggle in the Eastern Mediterranean as a response to recent approaches to reduce the definition and frame of Turkey’s Eastern Mediterranean policy. Turkey’s Eastern Mediterranean policy cannot be confined exclusively to the Greece-Turkey relations, Cyprus, the concept of “Blue Homeland”, or the hydrocarbon reserves. The study opposes such a reduction of it and asserts that the Turkey’s Eastern Mediterranean policy should be addressed from a broader perspective which includes all of the above, but is not limited to them. The study explains the purview of Turkey’s Eastern Mediterranean policy and, in this framework, discusses the pillars on which it should be founded. An analytical frame for Turkey’s Eastern Mediterranean strategy is presented by setting forth its aims, objectives, and the policies that have been implemented to date.
THE ACTORS OF THE RIVALRY IN THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN

Through a geographical reading, the Eastern Mediterranean, the outer borders of which consist of Libya and Greece, includes Turkey, Egypt, Israel, Palestine, Lebanon, Syria and Cyprus, i.e., the Greek Cypriot Administration (GCA) and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC). Among the Eastern Mediterranean countries, Turkey has the longest coastline in the Eastern Mediterranean (approximately 1,800 km), followed by Egypt with a little over 1,000 km. On the other hand, Greece, which remains on the agenda in regard to the designation of maritime borders within Turkey’s Eastern Mediterranean policy, has less than 200 km of coastline in the region in question. From this perspective, Turkey’s coastline is longer than the sum of the coastlines of Egypt, Greece, Israel, and Syria. (Graph 1)

Considering the island of Cyprus, with the addition to the 76-kilometer-long UK coastline originating from the sovereign bases on the island, the TRNC has a longer coastline than the Greek Cypriot Administration. However, it should be noted that the lengths of the coasts are meaningful to some extent in terms of being a party to the power struggle in the Eastern Mediterranean, but they are not enough to explain the parties’ influence, and engagements in the region. For instance, while Syria is among the relatively minor actors in terms of its impact on Eastern Mediterranean geopolitics due to the ongoing civil war there since 2011, the naval base of Russia, located in Syria and fortified after the crisis, makes Moscow an actor in the region via Syria. Although Lebanon has a coastline close
to that of Israel in length, it does not have the same impact as Israel due to Lebanon’s fragile political, economic, and military structure. On the other hand, the Greek Cypriot Administration is in a more advantageous position compared to the TRNC although it has a shorter coastline than the latter as the GCA uses the deadlock in the Cyprus issue, its international recognition, and its European Union membership to its favor.

Coastal lengths aside, each state does not have the same influence over Eastern Mediterranean geopolitics, and the Eastern Mediterranean agendas of states vary. This is closely related to the position of the concerned states in the Eastern Mediterranean, their national power capacity, the alliances they have developed, and perhaps most importantly, their basic motivation. In this context, Figure 1 which schematizes the tiers of the geopolitical contest in the Eastern Mediterranean provides a useful framework for classifying the sides of the issue and their effects in the process. As can be seen in the figure, the tiers are not independent of each other. Conversely, each layer is intertwined and closely related to the other layers. This intertwining inevitably causes the actors to participate and engage in the process in more than one layer through different motivations.
Coastal lengths aside, each state does not have the same influence over Eastern Mediterranean geopolitics, and the Eastern Mediterranean agendas of states vary. This is closely related to the position of the concerned states in the Eastern Mediterranean, their national power capacity, the alliances they have developed, and perhaps most importantly, their basic motivation. In this context, Figure 1 which schematizes the tiers of the geopolitical contest in the Eastern Mediterranean provides a useful framework for classifying the sides of the issue and their effects in the process. As can be seen in the figure, the tiers are not independent of each other. Conversely, each layer is intertwined and closely related to the other layers. This intertwining inevitably causes the actors to participate and engage in the process in more than one layer through different motivations.

Maritime boundaries constitute the first tier of the Eastern Mediterranean geopolitical contest. What is meant here by maritime boundaries is not only the borders of territorial waters. In fact, considering the width of the Eastern Mediterranean, there are no problems with territorial waters among the states that have mutually facing coasts, and any problem concerning territorial waters between adjacent states is not considered a vital problem. The main problem here arises from the continental shelf or exclusive economic zone (EEZ) delimitations beyond territorial waters. Although this issue, which is important in terms of energy competition, as will be discussed below, concerns all littoral states, it is possible today to classify the actors concerned with maritime borders in two categories: major and secondary. The main actors can be considered in two groups: the states that have a coast on the Eastern Mediterranean and the states that do not have a coast. In this context, major actors who have a coast on the Eastern Mediterranean are Turkey, Greece, Egypt, Israel, the TRNC, and the GCA. The EU, France, and the U.S. may be considered as actors that do not have a coast on the Eastern Mediterranean, but that try to have an impact on the dynamics of the region through the issue of maritime borders. States such as Palestine, Lebanon, Syria, and Libya are considered among the secondary actors of the maritime border dimension, largely due to their fragile structures.

Energy competition constitutes the second layer of the Eastern Mediterranean geopolitical struggle. This issue came to the fore, particularly in the 2000s, in line with the progress in marine research and drilling technology, and today, is an...
important front of the geopolitical contest in the region. Effective actors in the energy competition may be categorized under three groups. In the first group, there are source countries that have sovereign power in the region where energy is found, searched, or extracted. In the second group, there are states or energy companies which conduct or plan to conduct search/drilling in the areas mentioned in the first group. In the third group, there are actors who plan to purchase, for internal consumption, the hydrocarbons that are extracted from the sources located in these areas in an effort aiming to reduce their dependence on other suppliers in the medium/long term or diversify their resources. At this point, all littoral states in the Eastern Mediterranean are included in the first category with the exceptional status of Turkey and Israel. Since Turkey and Israel, along with other non-regional states or multinational energy companies are categorized in the second group. The third group again includes all coastal states as consumers/buyers plus the others including the European countries as the potential consumers/buyers.

The third tier of the geopolitical struggle in the Eastern Mediterranean is the regional and global power struggle. While the latter has the quality to blanket and affect the other two dimensions, it is actually an issue that should be considered beyond the maritime boundaries and energy competition. In other words, before any agenda regarding sea borders and energy emerged, throughout the course of history, the Eastern Mediterranean has been a focal point of numerous power struggles.1 The power struggle in the past, mainly for its geopolitical position, combined with a different dynamic: the introduction of potential energy reserves in the region. While one dimension of this power struggle is related to the power projection of regional actors, the other is related to the recently revived interest of global powers in the region.2

Today, at a time when the struggle for influence among regional and global actors is interrelated and intertwined, the effective actors in the Eastern Mediterranean power struggle do not consist only of the coastal states. In the power struggle among coastal states, Turkey, Egypt, Israel, and partly Greece is at the forefront. Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) which do not have a coast in the region are also present in this struggle. On the global level, the EU,

along with the U.S., France, and Russia are included in this power struggle as well. (Table 1)

On the other hand, it should be noted that the regional and global power struggle in question is not limited to the Eastern Mediterranean. In other words, the regional and global power struggle in sub-regional systems such as the Persian Gulf, North Africa, the Arabian Peninsula, the Horn of Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa, and the Balkans are not independent from the struggle in the Eastern Mediterranean. In fact, the parties of the power struggles in the abovementioned regions are largely the same. Therefore, one can safely say that the Eastern Mediterranean is one of the important fronts of the wider regional and global power struggle.

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<th>TABLE 1. PARTIES OF THE GEOPOLITICAL POWER STRUGGLE IN THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN</th>
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<td><strong>Regional and Global Power Struggle</strong></td>
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There are also attempts to make energy competition and maritime borders an instrument of the regional and global power struggle in the Eastern Mediterranean. In this setting, the involvement of non-regional actors in the delimitation of maritime boundaries that concerns only coastal states or the involvement of external actors in sharing energy that concerns first-degree source countries should not be considered as independent from the regional and global power struggle.

The instrumentalization of maritime boundaries or the energy issue appears in two dimensions. In the first dimension, the coastal states in the Eastern Mediterranean as the main party of the issue are trying to achieve the goals which they cannot attain on their own through cooperation with non-regional powers. In the second dimension, the non-regional actors, in order to gain and strengthen their positions in the power struggle, seek to cooperate with coastal states on the fronts that their interests converge. For instance, Greece and the Greek Cypriot Admin-
istration cooperate with France, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and the U.S. in order to gain advantages against Turkey and the TRNC.

In order to gain an advantage in the global power struggle and power projections, the U.S. and France, on the other hand, regard cooperation with these actors as a useful instrument. Through Greece and the GCA, Saudi Arabia and the UAE, which have not had any engagement in this region in the past, attempt to join the equation to balance Turkey and narrow its influence in the regional power struggle.

In sum, there are attempts to reduce the geopolitical struggle in the Eastern Mediterranean to relations between Turkey and Greece, energy competition, or the concept of “Blue Homeland.” However, this geopolitical struggle is multilayered and multilateral in nature - it includes all the above and goes beyond them as well. Considering the maritime boundaries, energy competition, and global and regional dimension of this power struggle, Turkey having the longest coastline in the Eastern Mediterranean takes the stage as a primary actor in all dimensions and interacts with different actors. Any change in any of these dimensions has a potential to affect Turkey and its position in other dimensions directly. Therefore, a comprehensive description of Turkey’s Eastern Mediterranean strategy and its integrated implementation is necessary.
Turkey’s Eastern Mediterranean policy rests in principle on four pillars. Although each one of these pillars exhibits its own unique character, they also have a relation with one another and, as a whole, constitute the scope of Turkey’s Eastern Mediterranean policy. In specific, these pillars are the Cyprus issue, the regional power struggle, hydrocarbon reserves, and its impact on the problems in the Aegean Sea. The last two, in particular, have been added to Turkey’s agenda recently. That is to say, the regional power struggle and the Cyprus, in historical perspective, were also critical pillars of the Eastern Mediterranean policy even prior to the establishment of the Republic of Turkey, in the Ottoman era. The two issues remained in the foreground in the Republican period and after World War II in particular.

The relationship between Turkey’s Eastern Mediterranean policy and the Aegean Sea revived with the tensions in Turkey-Greece relations and Athen’s maximalist policies since 1960s. However, this pillar become more prominent as Greece regarded itself as a major actor in sharing maritime boundaries in the Eastern Mediterranean and acted together with the GCA. Lastly, search and drilling of hydrocarbon reserves in the Eastern Mediterranean, which started in the 2000s and increased gradually, became one of the pillars of Turkey’s Eastern Mediterranean policy in the context of energy competition.
In fact, the island of Cyprus has been at the center of Turkey’s Eastern Mediterranean policy at least for 450 years, namely since the Ottoman Empire conquered the island in 1571. The Republic of Cyprus was established in the Republican period with the treaties of Zurich and London, which were signed in 1959. Cyprus is of strategic importance for Turkey, one of the guarantor states of the Republic of Cyprus, in two aspects: for the protection of the rights and interests of the Turkish Cypriots, and for Turkey’s own national security. The strategic importance of the island has increased with the introduction of maritime boundaries and the energy competition dimensions.

The territorial order of the day has largely been established with the Cyprus Peace Operation launched in 1974 because of the terrorist acts of the Greek Cypriots against the Turkish community in the island commencing in 1963 and the coup that took place in 1974 for enosis, namely in order to unite the island with Greece. The TRNC declared independence in 1983 upon the failure of the diplomatic efforts to settle the issue. The last comprehensive initiative to resolve the Cyprus issue was the one proposed by the late UN Secretary General Kofi Annan in 2002, called the “Annan Plan.” However, in the referendum held in 2004 as part of the Annan Plan regulations, Turkish Cypriots supported the solution while the Greek Cypriots voted against it. So, the Greek Cypriots put an end to any possible

3 In the referendum held on April 24, 2004 for the Annan Plan, Cypriot Turks agreed to the plan with a percentage of 64.91 while Greek Cypriots rejected it with a percentage of 75.83. Kemal İnat and Burhanettin Duran, “Türkiye’nin Doğu Akdeniz Politikasının Temel Parametreleri,” pp. 12-15.
solution arising from the plan. In 2004, the EU membership of the GCA, as the sole representative of the whole island, made the solution of the problem even more difficult. The EU membership lowered the pressure on the GCA to seek a solution to the problem and paved the way for the GCA to use this membership as a critical instrument to take steps against the rights and interests of the TRNC, the Turkish Cypriots, and Turkey.4

Recently, assessments of the Cyprus pillar of Turkey’s Eastern Mediterranean policy are only made through the energy competition and relations with Greece. However, it should once again be stressed that although Cyprus is related in Turkey’s Eastern Mediterranean policy to the energy dimension and maritime boundaries, it constitutes one of the main pillars of Turkey’s Eastern Mediterranean policy in terms of regional power struggles and the country’s mainland security per se.

The regional power struggle constitutes another pillar of Turkey’s Eastern Mediterranean policy and although closely related to the other pillars, it does not only refer to the struggle among the coastal states as discussed in Table 1. It takes place among the regional and global powers that do not have a coast on the Eastern Mediterranean. While one leg of the regional power struggle is the cyclical developments in the broader Middle East geopolitics, the other is the complications stemmed from the transformation in the global system and the attempts to fill the emerging power vacuums.5 In other words, power vacuums in the current global system and the attempts of different regional and global powers to fill these gaps cause an inevitable geopolitical competition, which is one of the focal points of the Eastern Mediterranean. Concordantly, issues such as maritime boundaries and the energy competition are utilized in the geopolitical competition. Some developments indirectly related to the region can also be used in the competition in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Hence, in one aspect, the Eastern Mediterranean is the center of a regional and global competition, and in another, it is an instrument of this very same competition. For instance, the recent activities of France in Libya and Syria should not be considered as independent from its policy in the Eastern Mediterranean as a whole. In fact, France stood by Greece and the GCA both individually and

5 For the discussions on the transformation in the global system, see Murat Yeşiltaş and Ferhat Pirinççi, Küresel Dönüşüm Sürecinde Türkiye’nin Büyük Stratejisi, (Seta Yayınları, Ankara: 2020), pp. 19-55.
by using the EU platform through the discussions over the maritime boundaries. It directed an aircraft carrier to the Eastern Mediterranean and tried to intervene in the power struggle in the Eastern Mediterranean by sending warplanes to the GCA. A similar situation is also valid for the UAE in terms of the regional power struggle. The UAE has been directly and indirectly involved in the crises in Libya and Syria as part of this power struggle across the Middle East. The United Arab Emirates have also developed closer ties with several countries, such as Egypt and Greece. In this connection, the UAE’s improved relations and the organization of joint military exercises with Greece means that the Abu Dhabi administration uses the Eastern Mediterranean as an instrument in power projection - although it is not at the center of its regional planning.

Energy constitutes the third pillar of Turkey’s Eastern Mediterranean policy. In a report published by the U.S. Geological Survey in 2010, it is estimated that there are 1.7 billion barrels of oil and 122 trillion cubic feet (tcf) of natural gas in the Eastern Mediterranean basin. No comprehensive report on potential reserves in the Eastern Mediterranean basin has been published in the last 11 years. However, it is known that more than 80 percent of the oil and natural gas reserves discovered throughout the world in the last decade have been found in the sea. The technology of exploration and extraction of hydrocarbon reserves in the sea is gradually developing as costs decrease in parallel with the development of technology. Thus, hydrocarbon reserves in the Eastern Mediterranean as a whole are expected to be much higher than previous estimations. In fact, energy reserves in the region form an important part of the debate over continental shelves or maritime borders on the axis of the EEZ in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Turkey and other coastal states do not have sufficient levels of proved hydrocarbon energy resources, so they have to outsource them. With the oil and natural gas discoveries in the Eastern Mediterranean, the primary goal of each country is, first, to become self-sufficient and, at a second stage, to become a supplier. Turkey’s main priority in the Eastern Mediterranean at this point is not only to protect its own rights and interests in the context of energy but also those of the TRNC.

The most important challenge here is the unilateral steps of the Greek Cypriot Administration rather than those of Greece. The GCA signed a maritime delimitation agreement with Egypt in 2003 against Turkey and the TRNC. In addition, without taking into account the rights of Turkish Cypriots, the GCA signed an agreement for EEZ/delimitation of maritime boundaries with Lebanon in 2007 and with Israel in 2010. Additionally, the GCA also unilaterally declared an EEZ in 2004 in such a way to cover the entire island. The GCA launched seismic searches in the areas it declared unilaterally in 2006, determined license areas, opened these fields to searches through tenders in 2007, and started drillings in this region in 2011.

Turkey, on the other hand, did not accept these unilateral steps, and signed a continental shelf delimitation agreement with the TRNC in 2011. In the same year, the TRNC designated license areas and granted exploration licenses to the Turkish Petroleum Corporation (TPAO). It should be noted that seven of the 13 areas licensed by the GCA coincide with the areas licensed by the TRNC.8 (Map 1)

In the scope of Turkey's Eastern Mediterranean policy, today, the energy pillar segment which concerns Greece may be considered secondary compared

to that of the GCA. This is because Greece has not yet declared any continental shelf or EEZ for the islands in the Aegean Sea and the Eastern Mediterranean where it is adjacent to Turkey, and has not negotiated with Turkey on the subject matter.

Turkey, on the other hand, started licensing activities in the Eastern Mediterranean in 2009, after signing a delimitation of continental shelf agreement with the TRNC and a memorandum of understanding with Libya on November 27, 2019. Turkey deposited the documents that contain the coordinates defining its continental shelf and its outer borders to the United Nations General Secretariat on March 18, 2020. An assessment of Turkey's continental shelf, through these coordinates, reveals that its continental shelf overlaps with the areas declared by the GCA. However, the degree of disagreement with the Athens administration is not known yet since Greece has not declared any maritime border in the region.

Map 2. Turkey’s Continental Shelf in the Eastern Mediterranean


11 For the original version of the outer limits of Turkey’s continental shelf in the Eastern Mediterranean see, UN General Assembly, p. 3.
However, the steps taken by Greece regarding maritime borders are of such a nature as to affect the interests of Turkey in the energy field. Indeed, Greece signed an EEZ agreement with Egypt on August 6, 2020 to by-pass the continental shelf declared by Turkey and, in particular, the continental shelf relation between Turkey and Libya. This agreement was ostensibly a response to the memorandum of understanding that Turkey and Libya signed on November 27, 2019. Indeed, the agreement Turkey signed with Libya isolates Greece in the Eastern Mediterranean and the agreement Greece signed with Egypt eliminates the maritime border connection between Turkey and Libya.

In addition, Greece’s agreement with Egypt is also closely related to the regional power struggle. Egypt chose to sign an agreement with Greece in a period of escalating tension in the Eastern Mediterranean, although it would have had a broader continental shelf had it signed an agreement with Turkey. Turkey declared the agreement between Greece and Egypt null and void, and sent seismic search vessels to the overlapping areas over which Greece claimed ownership in the concerning agreement, but which had been previously claimed by Turkey.

On the other hand, Turkey is also interested in delivering the gas to be extracted from the Eastern Mediterranean basin to consumer markets - regardless
of which country extracts it. In this context, the *EastMed pipeline* project was developed under the leadership of Greece and Israel with the expectation that the gas to be extracted would be more than the demand of the littoral countries. With the participation of the Greek Cypriot Administration, the three countries signed an agreement.\(^\text{12}\) The *EastMed* project, which has been a subject of hot debate over its feasibility and cost, foresees the delivery of the gas to be extracted from the sea to Europe via the island of Cyprus and Greece.\(^\text{13}\)

Problems experienced in the Eastern Mediterranean with Greece constitute another pillar of Turkey’s Eastern Mediterranean policy – although these are secondary compared to others. Greece envisions itself as owning areas of the Eastern Mediterranean inspiring from the map known as the “Seville Map” prepared by Spanish academics from the University of Seville in the early 2000s.


Even the Seville map is not legally binding and creates an uninterrupted border between Greece and the GCA via the EEZs. Meanwhile the GCA’s official accounts depict maritime boundaries as so-called “EU marine waters” based on

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this map.\textsuperscript{14} Steps to actualize this picture, which grants mainland status to Greek islands yet gives Turkey only a piece of depth in Antalya Bay, would give rise to possible problems between Turkey and Greece in the Aegean Sea. For instance, according to Greek claims, the island of Kastellorizo which is located 2 km away from Turkey and 580 km from the Greek mainland, with its less than 10 km\textsuperscript{2} area, should have the right of about 40,000 km\textsuperscript{2} continental shelf.

In addition to the problems with Greece, such as territorial waters, air space, and the militarization of the islands in the Aegean Sea, there are also problems such as the continental shelf and gray areas, namely uncertain status geographical formations like islands, islets and rocks. The delimitation of continental shelf in the Aegean Sea will be directly affected by a possible reconciliation between the two countries in the Eastern Mediterranean. Furthermore, it should be noted that, at times, Greece is inclined to reflect the tensions experienced with Turkey in the Aegean to the Eastern Mediterranean, and, vice versa, the artificial tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean to the problems in the Aegean.

\textsuperscript{14} In the presentations made to various embassies by the undersecretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the GCA, Tasos Tzionis, it is claimed that the Seville Map establishes an uninterrupted EEZ line between Greece and the GCA, and this is referred to as “EU maritime areas.” See http://www.mfa.gov.cy/mfa/mfa2016.nsf/3151B8B8AE492239C225840B00415D3C/$file/FOR%20WEB%20Presentation%20to%20EU%20HoMs%2031.05.2019%20(FINAL%2031.05.2019)ii.pdf, p. 2, (retrieved on September 5, 2020).
TURKEY’S EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN STRATEGY

Considering the size and the scope of Turkey’s geopolitical struggle in the Eastern Mediterranean, Turkey’s objective in its Eastern Mediterranean policy can be explained in two dimensions: the basic tactical dimension and the strategical dimension.

TACTICAL OBJECTIVE AND GOALS

On the tactical level, the aim is the rejection of the maritime limitation envisaged by Greece and the Greek Cypriot Administration, and ensuring that all the involved parties recognize a sea border suitable for the declared Turkish continental shelf. In order to achieve this objective, Turkey’s Eastern Mediterranean policy has been put into action in the frame of three goals.

The first of these goals is to block Greece’s maximalist policy and prevent it from harming Turkey’s rights and interests in the Eastern Mediterranean. Greece aims to ensure uninterrupted unity with the Greek Cypriot Administration in the maritime jurisdictions of the Eastern Mediterranean by, on occasion, taking advantage of the good course of bilateral relations and, at other occasions, taking advantage of regional and global dynamics. This is exactly how Greece acted in its territorial expansion and against the balance of the Lausanne Treaty in the Aegean Sea.15 The Seville Map, which was put into effect and has been opened for discus-

sion although it has no official status, is, in a sense, a written version of this Greek purpose. Having realized that it is less likely to achieve this goal by itself, Greece is trying to limit the influence of Turkey in different ways. First, Greece has made an attempt to raise the issue from a bilateral level to an international level and, in particular, is trying to turn it into an issue between Turkey and the EU, as opposed to an issue between Greece and Turkey. Greece is also trying to win the support of the U.S. by using the Greek lobby and taking advantage of the problems in the Turkey-U.S. relations. On the other hand, Greece seeks cooperation with the parties that are against Turkey in the regional and global power struggle taking place in the Eastern Mediterranean or outside the Eastern Mediterranean. The latter is an effort to balance out Turkey.

Turkey, on the other hand, displays two kinds of reactions. First, by issuing NAVTEXs,16 Turkey carries out seismic research activities at the outer boundaries of the continental shelf and at some points deemed strategic with offshore drilling ships that will be discussed below.17 By carrying out seismic research activities in the field, which can be defined in a sense as power demonstration, Turkey shows that the areas that Greece has not announced yet but over which has claimed ownership are part of the Turkish continental shelf. At this stage, ships of the Turkish Naval Forces accompany the seismic research vessels to prevent any obstruction and for deterrence. Neither Greece nor any other actor has dared to take any step to prevent these seismic research activities yet.

Turkey’s second reaction is constantly to repeat that it is open to negotiations with Greece without any preconditions. Turkey’s statements that it does not have any intention to create tension or escalate the tension are a sign that the problems with Greece can be resolved through negotiations.18

Turkey’s second objective on the tactical level relates to the Cyprus issue. Turkey does not accept the GCA’s specifying unilateral maritime jurisdiction, for the reason that it overlooks Turkey’s continental shelf and the TRNC’s maritime rights. Thus, Turkey objects to developments that harm or limit its own maritime jurisdiction areas and the rights of the TRNC, and therefore, the rights of

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<td>Rejecting the sea borders envisaged by Greece and the Greek Cypriot Administration, and ensuring that all the involved parties recognize a sea border suitable for the declared Turkish continental shelf.</td>
<td>Hindering Greece's maximalist policy, and therefore, preventing Greece from harming the rights and interests of Turkey in the Eastern Mediterranean.</td>
<td>Conducting research activities with national seismic vessels at the outer borders of the continental shelf and at certain strategic points.</td>
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<td>Blocking unilateral steps of the GCA from harming the interests of Turkey and the TRNC.</td>
<td>Inviting steps to reduce tension and negotiations without preconditions.</td>
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<td>Hindering any developments that would harm energy security.</td>
<td>Continental shelf delimitation agreement between the TRNC and Turkey, and TPAO seismic survey.</td>
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<td>Supporting the TRNC’s cooperation proposals.</td>
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<td>National seismic survey and drilling ships.</td>
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<td>Showing the flag through seismic surveys in the area.</td>
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<td>Proposal for the Eastern Mediterranean Energy Cooperation Forum</td>
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Cypriot Turks in the Eastern Mediterranean. In fact, the GCA takes unilateral steps in terms of maritime jurisdiction areas and hydrocarbon reserves - as it does in many other areas as well - by ignoring the rights of the TRNC and the Turkish Cypriots.

As the guarantor and in order not to aggrieve the TRNC and Turkish Cypriots, Turkey shows both verbally and practically that it will not allow any fait accompli. At this point, Turkey has objected from stage one to the steps of the GCA and showed two types of reactions since 2011. First, Turkey, signed an agreement concerning the delimitation of its continental shelf with the TRNC, and the TRNC has announced license areas within its own continental shelf and given permission to the TPAO for search activities.

In line with this agreement, since September 27, 2011, the TPAO has launched seismic searches in the TRNC’s licensed areas that overlap with the areas declared by the GCA. Ships of the Turkish Naval Forces accompany the TPAO’s research vessels for protection purposes. Second, since 2011, the TRNC has offered to cooperate with the GCA - the latest offer was in 2019.19

The third tactical target of Turkey’s Eastern Mediterranean policy is to inhibit developments that would harm its energy security. When the worldwide growing trend in the exploration of hydrocarbon reserves in the sea is considered alongside the relevant potential reserves in the Eastern Mediterranean, Turkey will very likely begin to explore new areas and start production as it has in the Black Sea as well as search and drilling activities in its own sea areas. That means Turkey, currently an energy importer, will transform into an energy supplier in the middle and long run. In addition, it is also important to prevent the exclusion of Turkey from the delivery of the energy surplus in the region. Indeed, the Turkish territory is the most advantageous and cost-effective route in terms of pipelines and connections, and serious discussions over the feasibility and future of the planned EastMed pipeline are underway.20

Meanwhile, another development causing an energy security risk is the indirect attempts to confound or deactivate, by using various methods, Turkey’s rights and claims to its maritime jurisdiction areas in the Eastern Mediterranean. In

19 In the cooperation proposals made in 2011, 2012, and 2019, the TRNC basically offered to make a joint decision regarding the suspension of the exploration and drilling activities or the sharing of the income to be generated as a result of the exploration and drilling activities until the two parties agreed, but the GCA did not accept these proposals. See Erciyes, p. 23.

this context, on March 8, 2021, Greece, the GCA, and Israel signed a memorandum of understanding for the EU-backed project to build a power connection known as EuroAsia Interconnector. According to the project, the connector passes through the continental shelf of Turkey – a fact that Turkey has not been informed about. In normal conditions, cable connections must not affect Turkey’s present and future activities if it would pass through her continental shelf. Ankara issued a diplomatic note to Greece, the GCA, and Israel for required permission or information about the project in order to stress that Turkey is aware that the project would pass through its continental shelf.21

At this point, Turkey shows three types of reactions in order to maintain its energy security in the Eastern Mediterranean. One is to build national energy search and drilling infrastructure to provide and strengthen its energy security in the seas – and not limited to the Eastern Mediterranean. To this end, Turkey included in its inventory the seismic research vessels Barbaros Hayrettin Paşa and Oruç Reis, in 2013 and 2015 respectively. Additionally, Turkey added the drilling ships Fatih, Yavuz, and Kanuni to its energy fleet in 2017, 2018, and 2020 respectively. Turkey was previously leasing high-cost drilling ships from energy companies. In fact, the country announced plans to purchase a fourth drilling ship in 2021.22 Along with Turkey, only Israel own research and drilling vessels in the Eastern Mediterranean, Turkey has the largest and most advanced research and drilling fleet among the coastal states.

In order to maintain its energy security in the Eastern Mediterranean, Turkey’s second reaction was to show Greece that its maximalist envisagements will not be accepted and to send a research vessel in the company of warships for seismic research in the areas, which are unilaterally declared by the GCA and overlap with the TRNC’s continental shelf. This is also an implicit message to companies which would engage in activities in licensed areas declared by the GCA (and which overlap with the TRNC’s continental shelf).

Turkey’s third reaction includes the island of Cyprus and other stakeholders. In this context, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan called for the formation of an inclusive energy cooperation forum to bring together all involved parties, including


Turkish Cypriots, in the Eastern Mediterranean.\footnote{“Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan’ dan AB liderlerine mektup”, Anadolu Ajansı, September 30, 2020, https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/politika/cumhurbaskani-erdogandan-ab-liderlerine-mektup/1990255, (retrieved on January 15, 2021).} The term “inclusive” is meant not only for Greece or the Greek Cypriots but also for all stakeholders that are involved in the matter, including the EU.

In one aspect, this reaction by Turkey may be assessed as a sincere call to reduce the tension and settle disputes over energy sharing in the region. From another perspective, it may be seen as an attempt to fend off moves to isolate Turkey (and Turkish Cypriots) from the energy equation in the Eastern Mediterranean. In fact, Egypt, Israel, Greece, the GCA, Jordan, and Italy formed the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum in 2019. This initiative became an official institution shortly before Turkey’s aforementioned call.\footnote{The Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum hosted by Egypt was established on January 16, 2019 with the participation of Greece, Cyprus, Israel, Jordan, and Italy, and became official on September 22, 2020. See Presidential Department of Communication, Türkiye’nin Doğu Akdeniz Stratejisi, 2020, p. 58.}

**STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE AND GOALS**

The strategic level of Turkey’s East Mediterranean policy aims to prevent any attempt by any country, whether it is regional or global power, to restrict Turkey’s increasing influence in the region, narrow its maneuverability, and besiege or contain the country within its Anatolian shores.

In fact, the geopolitical shocks that have occurred in the Middle East and North Africa in the last decade have caused the emergence of power vacuum, and regional/global actors have entered into a fierce struggle to fill them. As emphasized earlier, this struggle is not limited to the Eastern Mediterranean, but covers the entire region including North Africa, the Horn of Africa, the Persian Gulf, and even South Caucasia. However, the Eastern Mediterranean embodies a key focal point of the struggle.

The struggle to fill power vacuum continues primarily as a zero-sum relationship between the parties. In other words, the success of one actor in these regions, and particularly in the Eastern Mediterranean, is perceived as a loss for the others. The reason for this is that the parties have mainly conflicting interests.

Generally the struggle in question occurs implicitly. The tension is experienced among major actors through proxy actors or matters. As far as the Eastern Mediterranean is concerned, Greece and recently the GCA are seen to have been used as proxy actors by anti-Turkey block in the regional power struggle. In oth-
### TABLE 3. TURKEY’S STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE AND GOALS IN THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN

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<th>Strategic Level</th>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>Goals</th>
<th>Policies</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Objective</strong></td>
<td>To prevent the attempts of another power in the Eastern Mediterranean to restrict Turkey’s increasing influence, besiege Turkey or contain it within its Anatolian shores.</td>
<td>A permanent solution to the Cyprus issue or preserving the status quo.</td>
<td>To launch a new initiative to settle the issue, the proposal of two-state solution.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Goals</strong></td>
<td>To weaken the anti-Turkey bloc and disrupt its attempts.</td>
<td>To prevent the consolidation of opposing powers through bilateral relations.</td>
<td>Use of military force, showing the flag.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Policies</strong></td>
<td>Diplomacy, call for negotiation without preconditions.</td>
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er words, what under normal circumstances is a dispute over a technical issue between the two countries is artificially turned into a main agenda item in terms of the regional power struggle and this causes involvement of other actors to the issue. At this point, as Turkey’s room for maneuver expands and influence rises in the areas of struggle and in regions such as North Africa, the Horn of Africa, and Syria, actors that recently have a conflict of interest with Turkey engage in an intense solidarity against the backdrop of the Eastern Mediterranean.

Turkey’s first objective in order to achieve its strategic goal in the Eastern Mediterranean is to find a permanent solution to the Cyprus issue, or at worst, to preserve the status quo. Beyond the Cyprus problem, recently, risks have emerged to disrupt Turkey’s relations with the TRNC. In the short run, these risks have been substantially eliminated with the election of Ersin Tatar as the new president of the TRNC in the elections of October 2020. During Tatar’s 5-year term as TRNC president, the Turkish Cypriot government is expectedly to follow a political line in harmony with Turkey: the two states will adopt a policy to settle the Cyprus issue together.

In this regard, the proposal of a two-state solution is a significantly different stance than the previous ones such as a loose or tight federation, a bizonal structure, bicommunal structure, etc. In fact, President Tatar and President Erdoğan have begun to voice the inevitability of the two-state solution before the informal talks between the UN, Turkey, Greece, TRNC, GCA and the UK that were held in Geneva at the end of April 2021.25

The second objective for Turkey to achieve its strategic goal is to fend off the moves of the anti-Turkey bloc, which has become more evident, and to weaken it. In fact, in almost all of the regions where power vacuums occur, including the Middle East, North Africa, the Horn of Africa, and the Persian Gulf, the actors who are disturbed by the expansion of Turkey’s influence and by its increasing strategic autonomy have united to form an anti-Turkey bloc – in recent years, this comes to the forefront particularly in the Eastern Mediterranean.

In order to reduce Turkey’s growing influence in the Eastern Mediterranean, the anti-Turkey bloc tries to use Libya, Syria, Lebanon, Greece (in the context of

maritime boundaries), the GCA (in the context of the Cyprus problem), and the EU platform (in all of these areas). Ankara, on the other hand, has shown three types of reactions against the anti-Turkey bloc.

First, by effectively using military instruments, Turkey has shown that a *fait accompli* will not be accepted. By doing so, Turkey has increased its deterrence. Developments, such as the military operations conducted in Syria, the success achieved in Libya by supporting the legitimate government, and the lack of military initiatives to challenge Turkey’s seismic searches in the Eastern Mediterranean can be considered in this direction. Turkey’s second reaction is to use diplomatic means concurrently with military means, and invite the parties in most of the struggle regions to negotiation without preconditions.

Turkey’s third reaction comes via the bilateral relations with the parties that have coinciding interests with Turkey in order to weaken the anti-Turkey bloc or to disrupt its attempts. Owing to the last two reactions, in particular, Turkey prevented the consolidation and multiplication of the parties that intend to increase pressure on the former. The prevention of using the NATO platform against Turkey regarding the developments in Libya, of using the EU platform against Turkey on the issue of the tension over maritime jurisdiction areas in the Eastern Mediterranean, and the incoming signs that the parties have started to review their policies - particularly in the recent period - are developments that cannot be considered independently without Turkey’s second and third reactions.
Recently, Turkey is facing many challenges in its foreign and security policies. One of the areas where these challenges have intensified is the Eastern Mediterranean. The challenges that occur in different dimensions in the Eastern Mediterranean have the potential if they are not dealt with and balanced, to create critical costs to Turkey’s foreign and security policies. In this respect, beyond being evaluated simply as a geographical region, the Eastern Mediterranean should be discussed in multiple dimensions as a critical front for the global and regional power struggle.

The recent military and political tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean shouldn’t be discussed solely through the undeclared maritime jurisdiction areas between Turkey and Greece resulting from Athens’s maximalist ambitions nor solely through the energy competition in the region. Certain dynamics that appear at the forefront in the Eastern Mediterranean are merely the tip of the iceberg.

Turkey’s Eastern Mediterranean policy has been built on four pillars: the Cyprus issue, energy competition, regional power struggle, and the issues with Greece. Each pillar is related to the others and important on its own. Therefore, substituting one with the other or ignoring one while prioritizing the other is out of the question. Considering Turkey’s latest steps in the Eastern Mediterranean, it can be argued that Turkey has an elevated awareness of the dimensions of the geopolitical equation in the Eastern Mediterranean.
In this framework, Turkey’s objective in the Eastern Mediterranean on the tactical level is to refute the maritime boundaries imagined by Greece and the GCA with resoluteness, and ensure that all the parties (de jure or de facto) recognize a maritime boundary suitable for the declared Turkish continental shelf. Turkey’s objective on the strategic level is to prevent attempts to restrict its increasing influence in the region, to narrow its maneuvering space, besiege the country, or contain it within its shores. Turkey uses various means to reach these objectives including military and diplomatic means, and its capacity to build infrastructure for the extraction of hydrocarbons from the sea. Owing to this, Turkey has not experienced any serious setback in the Eastern Mediterranean policy.

On the other hand, it is a fact that challenges to Turkey’s Eastern Mediterranean policy will never end. It is even more likely that these challenges will multiply and become increasingly complicated. In this context, the most important risk in the short run is the increasing number of the actors becoming involved in the regional power struggle, and the possibility of their impact on the dynamics in the other dimensions. Recent history has shown that the actors who have overlapping interests against Turkey - although they have different goals - easily unite under the anti-Turkey front. Hence, it is critical to discuss Turkey’s Eastern Mediterranean policy in a dynamic framework.

Being in constant struggle while reaching its objectives in the Eastern Mediterranean has helped Turkey gain significant experience. The means Turkey uses to reciprocate in the face of the challenges in the Eastern Mediterranean and beyond have also diversified and strengthened. Turkey’s accumulated experience and means will undoubtedly have a significant role in balancing the new and potential challenges. As a consequence, the increasing deterrence in the region, the determination, and the stance that does not exclude diplomacy, displayed by Ankara in the recent past will introduce a significant advantage to Turkey’s Eastern Mediterranean policy in the upcoming period.
This study analyzes Turkey’s Eastern Mediterranean policy and tries to define the priorities and dimensions of the geopolitical struggle in the Eastern Mediterranean as a response to recent approaches to reduce the definition and frame of Turkey’s Eastern Mediterranean policy. Turkey’s Eastern Mediterranean policy cannot be confined exclusively to the Greece-Turkey relations, Cyprus, the concept of “Blue Homeland”, or the hydrocarbon reserves. The study opposes such a reduction of it and asserts that the Turkey’s Eastern Mediterranean policy should be addressed from a broader perspective which includes all of the above, but is not limited to them. The study explains the purview of Turkey’s Eastern Mediterranean policy and, in this framework, discusses the pillars on which it should be founded. An analytical frame for Turkey’s Eastern Mediterranean strategy is presented by setting forth its aims, objectives, and the policies that have been implemented to date.