

Energy Geopolitics in Cyprus: A Comparative Analysis of Northern Cyprus and the Greek Cypriot Administration in Regional and Global Contexts

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Abstract

This study examines energy geopolitics in the Eastern Mediterranean by comparing the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) with the Greek Cypriot Administration (GCA). It asks how the region's offshore natural gas discoveries have shifted the Cyprus issue beyond a primarily political and ethnic conflict, turning it into a multidimensional geopolitical and geo-economic dispute tied to regional and global energy security dynamics. The study argues that energy resources can support cooperation, but they can also generate conflict; much depends on the political and legal frameworks surrounding them. The authorities administering the southern part of Cyprus have drawn on the internationally recognized status of the Republic of Cyprus and its membership in the European Union to formalize energy diplomacy, reinforce Western-oriented foreign policy alignment, and attract investment from multinational energy companies. Northern Cyprus, by contrast, has an energy strategy that remains structurally dependent on Türkiye's geopolitical doctrine in the Eastern Mediterranean. Because it has limited international recognition, the TRNC cannot access global energy markets independently. The study examines how global actors including the EU, the US, Russia, and China shape the region's energy equation. It shows that energy resources deepen the island's geopolitical fragmentation by reinforcing unequal patterns of international legitimacy and security dependence. Consequently, the study concludes that lasting stability in the Eastern Mediterranean depends on more than fair resource-sharing mechanisms. It also calls for an inclusive political settlement and a multilateral security framework capable of addressing the structural asymmetries between North and South Cyprus. The current evidence supports a potential contribu-

tion, not a claim that Cypriot gas will by itself substantially transform European energy security. Current evidence is particularly important here: the EIA reports that Cyprus's fields remain under development, with production dependent on further investment and development decisions, while the Aphrodite development plan specifically envisages export through Egypt. The proposed EastMed route is technically substantial, about 1,900 km, and designed for up to 12 bcm/year, but that does not mean that the route is commercially assured. The study examines how offshore gas resources in the Eastern Mediterranean may contribute to regional and European energy diversification while also generating geopolitical competition. It argues that the strategic significance of Cypriot gas depends not only on estimated resource volumes but also on the commercial development of fields, export infrastructure, transportation costs, and the feasibility of proposed routes to international markets.

Keywords

Cyprus, Energy Geopolitics, Eastern Mediterranean, Hydrocarbon Resources, Energy Security, Northern Cyprus, Southern Cyprus, Regional Actors

1. Introduction

This study explores the energy policies, foreign policy orientations, and geopolitical relations of the TRNC and the GCA with regional and global actors in the context of Eastern Mediterranean energy geopolitics. For the purposes of this study, it is important to distinguish between the internationally recognized Republic of Cyprus and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC). The latter is the *de facto* government of the breakaway northern region of Cyprus. The Republic of Cyprus is a unitary parliamentary republic, an EU member since 2004, and a sovereign state under international law. In this paper, the Greek Cypriot Administration, or GCA, is used when referring to the government of the Republic of Cyprus, especially with regard to matters of energy policy, exploration, licensing, and international relations. The GCA is identified by this name to make it clear that it is the internationally recognized government of Cyprus and not the TRNC. The expression Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus is used when referring to the *de facto* authorities of Northern Cyprus. The difference is subtle but significant in order to distinguish clearly between the international status of Cyprus as a whole and the political realities of the comparative analysis of the two governments. The objective of this study is to demonstrate how energy resources shape specific foreign policy agendas of the island's political entities as well as the role of energy diplomacy in their international legitimacy, strategic and defense-related considerations, and geopolitical positioning. The discovery of hydrocarbon resources in the Eastern Mediterranean has transformed the Cyprus issue from a primarily ethno-political dispute into a multilayered energy geopolitical issue. Particularly since the 2000s, the GCA's EEZ delineation policies and energy

sector liberalization decisions have made Cyprus a focal point in the regional energy politics.

This study argues that the GCA has leveraged energy diplomacy to advance its international standing, with EU integration serving as the key policy instrument for attracting energy investors. Energy diplomacy has enabled the GCA to achieve energy security through gas trilateralism and energy multilateralism with Greece, Israel, and Egypt, as well as through defense-related partnerships with France and the US. By contrast, the TRNC's foreign policy is characterized by a hedging approach to energy security through its strategic ties with Türkiye. Ankara's energy exploration and maritime delimitation policies in the Eastern Mediterranean have defined the TRNC's energy policies and limited its economic sovereignty. At the same time, the international isolation of the TRNC poses serious constraints on energy investment and foreign policy engagement.

The study explores energy security through the lens of international actors' strategic interests. For the EU, Eastern Mediterranean gas is an alternative energy source to reduce energy dependence on Russia. Energy security is central to the EU's geopolitical strategy, which seeks to counterbalance the revisionist tendencies of China and Russia as well as to support strategic alliances with the US, Israel, and the GCC states. For Russia, the Eastern Mediterranean is a region in which to balance against both China and the EU. Although Russia has maintained substantial political and economic interests in the Republic of Cyprus, the available evidence does not support characterizing Russia or Gazprom as a major direct commercial participant in the development of Cyprus's offshore natural gas resources.

The study's main argument is that Cyprus's offshore energy resources have the potential both to facilitate international negotiations and to trigger geopolitical confrontations. Energy diplomacy serves as a foreign policy instrument to promote the GCA's international standing as an energy-producing state, which complements its geopolitical aspirations to join the EU's energy security architecture. In contrast, the TRNC's energy diplomacy is subordinated to its strategic alliance with Türkiye. While energy resources do not override the Cyprus conflict's ethno-political dimensions, they add another layer of complexity to the international relations of both political entities. International mediation and multilateral energy security arrangements offer a viable way to address the Cypriot issue, which has long been a stumbling block in international relations.

Since the 1970s, Cyprus has been a flashpoint in international relations due to the Turkish invasion in 1974 and the ensuing division of the republic. The international community has been reluctant to recognize both the TRNC and the GCA, which continues to undermine regional security and stability. However, offshore natural gas discoveries in the Cypriot EEZ have transformed Cyprus from an ethno-political conflict into an energy geopolitical fault line. The discovery of significant gas reserves has triggered a strategic energy resource competition among regional and global actors. This competition has intensified with the recent energy deals between the GCA, Israel, Greece, and Egypt, as well as the EU and the US's

interest in regional energy security. The Cypriot energy sector has acquired global significance as it has the potential to shift the geopolitical balance in the Eastern Mediterranean. As such, the Cyprus issue and the Cypriot energy sector bear global geopolitical, economic, and strategic significance.

2. The Concepts of Energy Geopolitics and Energy Security

2.1. A Theoretical Perspective on Energy Security

Energy access, diversification of energy resources, and security of supply play a critical role in determining states' foreign policy. Energy security is a multifaceted concept that international relations theories approach from various theoretical perspectives (Yergin, 2011: pp. 16-18). The energy resource itself is regarded by international relations scholars as a foreign policy instrument, an ultimate goal, or a catalyst for international interactions. Access to energy resources is of paramount importance to states with economies highly integrated with energy production and international trade; a supply disruption causes economic downturns, political instability, and even national security issues (Shaffer, 2009: p. 36). Therefore, energy resources are deeply intertwined with states' foreign policy from both theoretical and practical perspectives. Energy security is regarded as a core national security matter by international relations scholars (Yergin, 2001: p. 26). The following section provides an in-depth theoretical discussion of the concept of energy security and its implications for foreign policy.

The international relations literature contains a number of theoretical perspectives, among which realism and liberalism have been the most influential in examining the role of energy resources in international politics. Realism is considered the most comprehensive theoretical framework for studying international politics, with its concepts being applied to various international issues, including energy security (Shaffer, 2009: p. 3). The fundamental principles of realism are relevant to the discussion of energy security, as states' foreign policy is to a large extent determined by their national interests. According to the neoclassical realism perspective, energy resources have become an integral part of states' national power and global competitiveness (Česnakas et al., 2010: p. 315). Realism views energy access and security as critical aspects of national security that demand states' utmost attention. The realist perspective on energy security is largely informed by the anarchic nature of the international system, which prompts states to behave competitively and pursue expansionist policies. Consequently, the realist perspective on energy resources is largely informed by geopolitical competition, with states seeking to maximize their energy resources and secure access to energy supplies.

The liberal perspective on energy security emphasizes interdependence, cooperation, and international collaboration to ensure stable energy supplies. Energy security, according to liberal internationalists, is a key pillar of the international political economy. The liberal approach views achieving energy security through international collaboration as the most realistic option, given the complexity of

global energy markets and the economic interdependence of major economies (Keohane, 1984: pp. 71-72). The liberal perspective on energy security is informed by the idea of international cooperation and mutual gains. International energy markets are viewed by liberals as crucial drivers for economic growth, international trade, and geopolitical stability. Given the importance of energy resources, liberalism promotes multilateral economic cooperation to ensure energy security both regionally and globally (Keohane & Nye, 1977: pp. 11-14).

It should be noted that realism and liberalism inform much of the discussion of energy security in international relations literature. The two approaches provide an adequate theoretical basis for understanding the foreign policy of states in relation to energy resources. When applied to the Cypriot energy sector, the liberal and realist approaches can provide valuable insights into the foreign policy choices made by the GCA and the TRNC in relation to natural gas.

2.2. The Relationship between Energy Resources and Foreign Policy

Energy resources are integral to any modern economy and, therefore, are deeply involved in the foreign policy decision-making of states. Transportation of energy resources plays a critical role in fueling economies; the strategic importance of the Republic of Cyprus has made energy-related international relations one of the most researched issues in international relations (Yergin, 2011: pp. 13-15). In this regard, energy geopolitics is a set of international relations theories concerned with the distribution of energy resources, the policies of states and markets in relation to energy resources, and their impact on international politics. Energy resources fuel economies; thus, the security of supply is of paramount importance to any energy-importing state and a critical foreign policy concern. Energy security is defined as a state's ability to ensure uninterrupted, reliable, and affordable energy supplies for its economy and society (Klare, 2001: pp. 24-26). Energy resources shape states' foreign policy from both theoretical and practical perspectives, which is evident in the strategic importance of energy resources to states' foreign policy agendas.

Since the dawn of the industrial revolution, access to energy has been a crucial aspect of states' foreign policy. Coal was the energy resource of choice before the 20th century, when oil and natural gas became instrumental in fueling the global economy. In the 21st century, alternative energy resources, rare earth metals, and other materials play a critical role in military-industrial complexes. As such, ensuring access to energy has become a foreign policy priority, a security concern for states, and an economic and strategic advantage for energy-producing states (Yergin, 2011: pp. 13-18). Energy resources can be integral to states' foreign policy, as they can serve as leverage in international negotiations. They can provide economic benefits to energy-producing states and regional economic blocs, as well as geopolitical advantages to energy-importing states and geopolitical alliances (Goldthau & Sitter, 2015: pp. 18-21).

When examining the importance of energy resources to states' foreign policy, it is essential to consider their status as sources of geopolitical competition. Energy resources are strategically located in particular territories, making access to them dependent on the foreign policy decisions of states hosting energy resources (Klare, 2001: p. 25). For states that rely on external energy supplies, ensuring access to energy resources is a foreign policy priority. For energy-producing states, energy resources are a valuable asset that can be leveraged in international negotiations. Energy resources are essential for economic development; therefore, their supply can become a pivotal point in international relations negotiations (Goldthau et al., 2024). As such, energy resources are integral to states' foreign policy in international relations.

When examining the relationship between energy resources and foreign policy, it is essential to consider the ways in which energy resources can be used as geopolitical tools. Energy resources can be beneficial to states in international negotiations but can also be a source of geopolitical tension and competition. States can employ various methods to utilize energy resources in foreign policy, including limiting or cutting off supplies, increasing prices, and restricting access to energy-producing facilities for economic or political reasons (Dinar, 2015: p. 89). The Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries initiated the 1973 oil embargo to undermine the economies of states that supported Israel during the Yom Kippur War, which demonstrated the potential of energy as a geopolitical tool. The oil crisis of 1973 became an example of how energy resources could be used in international relations to advance states' geopolitical objectives (Gregory Gause III, 2010: pp. 56-58). Energy security, therefore, holds profound implications for states' foreign policy.

2.3. The Importance of the Eastern Mediterranean in Energy Geopolitics

The Eastern Mediterranean has been a geopolitical crossroads throughout the history of the region. Its strategic location has enhanced its role in international relations and earned it a special place in the annals of world history. The Eastern Mediterranean has seen a surge in geopolitical interests since the end of the Cold War, as the region has revealed significant offshore natural gas resources. The Eastern Mediterranean has become the center of international relations as it contains alternative energy supplies for the EU and serves as an important transit corridor. The Eastern Mediterranean used to be a commercial hub, but now, with the Cypriot energy discoveries and the increased recognition of its energy potential, it is regarded as a crucial energy basin (Yergin, 2020: pp. 241-243).

The Eastern Mediterranean's role in energy geopolitics is driven by the natural gas reserves discovered in the Levant basin in 2000 (USGS). The Levant basin is estimated to contain 3,450 billion cubic meters of gas and 17 billion barrels of oil, according to the U.S. Geological Survey (2010). The natural gas reserves in the Tamar and Leviathan fields of Israel, the Zohr field of Egypt, and the Aphrodite

field of Cyprus are examples of the Eastern Mediterranean's energy wealth (Shaffer, 2009: pp. 112-115). The Eastern Mediterranean has become a region of global strategic importance due to its significance in the supply of natural gas to Europe and its role as a transportation corridor. The Eastern Mediterranean's role in energy geopolitics has prompted international competition for its resources and has increased its strategic importance. The Suez Canal and the SUMED pipeline, which carry oil and LNG from the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean to Europe, pass through the Eastern Mediterranean (IEA, 2019: pp. 38-39).

The Eastern Mediterranean's energy significance is determined by its location at the crossroads of geopolitical, economic, and strategic interests. The Eastern Mediterranean is the nexus where the energy resources of Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa meet those of Russia and Central Asia (Topcu, 2021: pp. 40-42). The Eastern Mediterranean has become an essential player in the energy geopolitics of the region since the gas discoveries. The Eastern Mediterranean's offshore natural gas resources have generated another dimension of geopolitical and economic competition: the great power rivalry. The energy wealth of the Eastern Mediterranean has triggered the strategic competition between Russia, China, the US, and the EU for the region's resources and strategic importance (Harunoğulları, 2025: pp. 115-118).

The Eastern Mediterranean, and more specifically Cyprus, possesses geographic strategic importance for global energy geopolitics. The Eastern Mediterranean offers access to both the Suez Canal and the Gulf of İskenderun. Whoever controls the Eastern Mediterranean can dictate the terms of trade and transit in the region. Controlling the Eastern Mediterranean could give Türkiye or another state access to critical sea routes and strategic resources, as well as give it significant geopolitical clout over the world's energy markets (Topcu, 2021: pp. 43-47). The Eastern Mediterranean, and particularly Cyprus, has strategic importance in the energy geopolitics of the region. Energy resources, transportation infrastructure, maritime boundaries, and geopolitical rivalries have contributed to the Eastern Mediterranean's critical role in energy geopolitics.

3. Methodology

This study aims to conduct a qualitative documentary analysis and comparison of the energy geopolitics of Northern and Southern Cyprus in regional and global contexts. The research will rely on official and intergovernmental documents, energy sector reports, publications, and related academic literature. The documentary resources include the reports and documents of the European Commission, International Energy Agency, the US Energy Information Administration, the US Geological Survey, Türkiye's state institutions, and energy companies active in the Eastern Mediterranean region. In addition, the study will include scholarly articles and reports on energy security, the geopolitical situation, delimitation issues, and foreign policy analysis of states and international organizations in the context of the Eastern Mediterranean region. The documentary evidence will be analyzed to

identify the policies, collaboration strategies, infrastructural projects, delimitation initiatives, security measures, and geopolitical interests of the states and international organizations mentioned above.

4. The Energy Geopolitics of Southern and Northern Cyprus

4.1. Energy Policies of the Greek Cypriot Administration (GCA)

The study is based on the argument that natural gas discoveries in the Eastern Mediterranean have transformed the Cyprus issue from an ethno-political dispute into a multilayered energy geopolitical issue. The Greek Cypriot administration (GCA) emphasizes the importance of natural gas for the GCA as a critical foreign policy instrument while also providing economic benefits to the GCA. The GCA's energy policy comprises three core elements: delimitation of exclusive economic zones and legal sovereignty, engaging multinational energy corporations, and connecting to the EU, as well as balancing the regional and international approaches. The GCA was initially a bicommunal country at the time of its independence in 1960. Nevertheless, intercommunal violence erupted in Cyprus in 1963, and the GCA became a Greek Cypriot administration (Ker-Lindsay, 2011: p. 34). The GCA was formally divided *de facto* after the Turkish invasion in 1974 and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) declaration of independence in 1983. Nevertheless, the GCA remained the sole international representative of Cyprus, which contributed to the Republic's improved diplomatic position (Bahcheli, 1990: p. 112). The GCA's energy policy also benefited from its accession to the EU in 2004, which was a critical element of the GCA's domestic and foreign policy (Tocci, 2004: p. 52). The EU enlargement provided the GCA's energy legislation with geopolitical, financial, and strategic credibility.

The GCA's energy policy was shaped in Cyprus, a country that found itself at the crossroads of international politics after the natural gas discoveries in the Eastern Mediterranean were made in the early 2000s. Indeed, the GCA has built its energy diplomacy on a three-pillar basis: reducing import dependency, exporting natural gas to European and international markets, and enhancing its geopolitical influence after the Aphrodite gas field discovery in 2011. The GCA opened its energy sector to international oil and gas companies, offering its technical expertise and expecting political backing from international partners (Tagliapietra, 2017: p. 90). In particular, ExxonMobil, Eni, and Total Energies have engaged in extensive energy diplomacy with the GCA. According to Tagliapietra (2017: p. 90), their presence there symbolizes economic and geopolitical gains for both the GCA and multinational corporations. It is possible to suggest that the GCA's energy diplomacy has been strongly dependent on its strategic partnership with the US and France, which has enhanced the GCA's political and economic reputation on a global scale.

The GCA's energy diplomacy has been manifested in the multilateralism of the Eastern Mediterranean, in particular in the framework of the tripartite alliance of the GCA, Greece, and Israel, where the GCA has taken a leading position. The

tripartite cooperation among the GCA, Greece, and Israel contributed to the development of the EastMed pipeline concept, which was designed to transport Eastern Mediterranean gas toward European markets. Nevertheless, the project's long offshore route, substantial infrastructure requirements, financing considerations, and changing European gas-market conditions have raised questions about its commercial and strategic feasibility. The proposed route should therefore be treated as one possible export option rather than as an assured mechanism for delivering Cypriot gas to Europe (Tagliapietra, 2017: p. 92).

Meanwhile, GCA's LNG cooperation with Egypt has been presented as an alternative to the EastMed pipeline project, which has faced numerous geopolitical challenges. Indeed, GCA's LNG cooperation with Egypt has benefited from the EU's natural gas policy, which has identified Eastern Mediterranean gas as a potential supplier to meet the Union's demand for energy (U.S. Energy Information Administration [EIA], 2025: p. 5). In particular, the EuroAsia electricity interconnection project fits into the EU energy strategy, and the trilateral energy negotiations between GCA, Greece, and Israel, which fall under the aegis of the Tripartite Forum, have created the basis for this project (European Commission, 2022: p. 11). It is possible to conclude that GCA has resorted to energy diplomacy as a tool of foreign policy that has given it geopolitical advantages at the regional and global levels.

The GCA's energy policy has been based on three main pillars: legal sovereignty, international oil and gas company partnerships, and engagement with the EU, as well as balancing international and regional strategies. For the GCA, energy diplomacy has been a tool of economic growth as well as a foreign policy instrument. The GCA's energy policy has encountered challenges posed by delimitation disputes, as well as security issues that should be considered in the context of the GCA's strategic importance.

4.2. GCA's Relations with Regional and Global Actors

The GCA's energy resources, security concerns, and accession to the EU in 2004 shaped the GCA's foreign policy course. In particular, since its accession to the EU, the GCA has pursued an energetic diplomatic policy in the Eastern Mediterranean. It has developed strategic energy relationships with Greece, Israel, Egypt, as well as the USA, the UK, Russia, China, and other international actors. It is necessary to discuss the GCA's regional and global partnerships in the context of the country's energy diplomacy. The energy diplomacy of the GCA has been manifested in various trilateral and multilateral meetings, of which the alliance with Greece and Israel is the most prominent. In particular, the tripartite meetings between the leaders of Greece, Israel, and the GCA have served as the framework for consultations on energy and security issues (Litsas & Tziampiris, 2015: p. 124). The GCA's energy diplomacy has included support for the development of regional gas infrastructure, including the proposed EastMed pipeline, which was designed to transport Eastern Mediterranean gas toward European markets

through Cyprus, Crete, and Greece. However, the technical, economic, financial, and geopolitical challenges associated with such a long offshore route have made its realization uncertain. The European Commission's project documentation describes the proposed EastMed route as approximately 1,900 km with a planned capacity of up to 12 bcm per year, demonstrating why the project involves substantial infrastructure requirements (Tagliapietra, 2017: p. 92). Additionally, the GCA's relationships with Egypt play a crucial role in the framework of its energy diplomacy. In particular, natural gas liquefaction plants in Egypt (Damietta and Idku) can serve as a reliable alternative for the GCA, which has found itself in need of diversifying its export opportunities due to the EastMed pipeline's prolonged delays. In particular, in 2025, the GCA and Egypt plan to develop the Cro-nos field in block 6 through LNG, which will be transported through Egypt's LNG terminals (ENI, 2025: p. 2). It is possible to suggest that the GCA's LNG cooperation with Egypt is motivated by the need to find alternatives to the EastMed pipeline.

Meanwhile, the GCA is one of the founding members of the East Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF) based in Cairo. Türkiye is not an observer of the East Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF). The current EMGF information identifies Cyprus, Egypt, France, Greece, Israel, Italy, Jordan, and Palestine as members, while the United States, EU, and World Bank are observers. Türkiye is not a member or observer. The EMGF has emerged as a platform for energy diplomacy in the Eastern Mediterranean, and the GCA has played a leading role in its creation (Tsakiris, 2021: pp. 149-152). For the GCA, EMGF membership has three advantages at once: legitimacy in the regional context, institutionalization of energy diplomacy, and the ability to participate in the development of a regional energy architecture from which Türkiye is currently absent. The absence of Türkiye from the EMGF, together with Ankara's objections to the Forum, illustrates the broader energy and geopolitical competition between Türkiye and the GCA in the Eastern Mediterranean. The EMGF was established as a regional intergovernmental organization by Egypt, Greece, Cyprus, Israel, Italy, Jordan, and Palestine, with France subsequently joining as a member. The United States, the European Union, and the World Bank participate as observers, whereas Türkiye is neither a member nor an observer of the Forum. The GCA's status in the East Mediterranean Gas Forum: A regional energy diplomacy outpost for Gulf Cooperation Council? The GCA is one of the founding members of the East Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF) based in Cairo. The EMGF, which was established by Egypt, Greece, Cyprus, Israel, Italy, Jordan, and Palestine, and formally joined by France, operates as a regional intergovernmental organization, with the United States, the European Union, and the World Bank as observers, while Türkiye is not a member-state or observer. The EMGF, as an institutional platform, was created to promote regional energy diplomacy and facilitate dialogue and collaboration between natural gas producers, consumers, and transit states. For the GCA, the Forum offers a venue to advance its regional energy diplomacy and to further strengthen cooperation with Greece, Is-

rael, Egypt, and other EMGF members. Meanwhile, Türkiye's lack of membership in the EMGF and its opposition to the Forum's establishment, as well as its broader antagonism towards Greece and the Republic of Cyprus, have fueled regional tensions and competing energy diplomacy initiatives. The official EMGF information confirms that Türkiye is not an observer; the current observers are the United States, European Union, and World Bank, while Türkiye remains outside the Forum.

By joining the EU, the Republic of Cyprus gained an important institutional framework for promoting its energy diplomacy. Eastern Mediterranean natural gas has also been discussed as a potential supplementary source for European energy diversification. However, the contribution of Cypriot gas to European energy security should be assessed cautiously. The scale of the currently identified resources, their development status, and the infrastructure required for export constrain the extent to which Cypriot gas can become a major source of European supply. For example, the Aphrodite field has an estimated resource of approximately 4.5 trillion cubic feet, but commercial production has not yet begun. The approved development plan envisages processing offshore gas through a floating production unit and exporting it to Egypt by subsea pipeline, where it can be liquefied and subsequently marketed internationally. Other Cypriot discoveries, including Cronos, Calypso, and Glaucus, remain at different stages of development, meaning that their potential contribution to European markets remains subject to further investment and infrastructure decisions. Accordingly, Cypriot gas is better understood as a potential supplementary component of European energy diversification rather than as a stand-alone solution to the EU's energy security challenges. In particular, the GCA fits into the EU strategy of reducing Russia's energy dominance by increasing the supply of natural gas from alternative sources, including Eastern Mediterranean gas (U.S. Energy Information Administration [EIA], 2025: p. 5). In particular, the EuroAsia electricity interconnector infrastructure project, linking Israel, the GCA, and Greece, has been included in the list of Projects of Common Interest by the European Commission (2022: p. 11). For the GCA, the electricity interconnection project signifies a reduction in its energy vulnerability as well as contributing to the EU's energy security.

The choice of the direction of gas exports seems especially crucial since Cyprus does not have the necessary infrastructure to export natural gas from its offshore reserves. The initial plan was to connect Cypriot gas fields with Egypt's gas-processing and LNG infrastructure to make it available for global markets. While the option of using Egypt's resources for processing and transportation seems viable, it still makes Cyprus dependent on the capabilities and capacity of the neighboring country to meet the requirements of another state. In addition, the U.S. Energy Information Agency highlights that Cyprus has plans to utilize Egypt's LNG infrastructure once its gas fields start operating, while taking into account that the LNG export capabilities of Egypt are already in demand. Thus, the value of the gas reserves that Cyprus possesses cannot be estimated solely based on their location

and potential production levels. The infrastructure needed, pipelines, and processing facilities for liquefaction and transportation to markets should also be taken into account.

Nevertheless, the GCA has limited energy resources, and its commercial attractiveness is complicated by security challenges. As a result, the GCA's energy diplomacy has focused on attracting foreign investment to the local energy sector. In particular, strategic partnerships with the US and France have been established, which have gained significant strategic importance for the GCA's energy security. At the same time, it is possible to suggest that the GCA has increasingly engaged in global energy diplomacy. In particular, by participating in the EMGF energy forum, the GCA has enhanced its energy profile at the international level and attracted multinational corporations to develop the Eastern Mediterranean. Additionally, it is possible to note that the GCA's foreign policy has been characterized not only by economic but also by geopolitical confrontation, which has enhanced its status in the Eastern Mediterranean.

4.3. The Importance of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) in Energy Geopolitics

The Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) has gained strategic importance due to the GCA finds in the Eastern Mediterranean, as well as its geopolitical influence in Cyprus. Although the TRNC is not recognized internationally, its influence on regional actors, as well as its strategic partnerships with Türkiye, makes it a key player in regional energy geopolitics. It is necessary to discuss the geopolitical importance of the TRNC, energy security, and the country's broader strategic implications and role.

The Eastern Mediterranean has long been a strategically important region for Türkiye for the sake of securing free access to the Mediterranean. The establishment of the British mandate over Cyprus was perceived as a threat to Türkiye's security, as the island provided Britain with maritime supremacy in the Eastern Mediterranean. Türkiye has striven to secure another passage to the Mediterranean, creating a security corridor around Cyprus (Hill, 1952: p. 14). Accordingly, Türkiye's military intervention in Cyprus in 1974 and the GCA of independence of the TRNC in 1983 enhance Türkiye's strategic position in the Eastern Mediterranean (Özersay, 2002: p. 78). From this perspective, the TRNC serves as an important strategic depth for Türkiye. The proximity to Anatolia, the shortest maritime route to Europe through the Eastern Mediterranean, as well as the Levant basin, ensures the strategic importance of the TRNC in the regional energy geopolitics.

Natural gas discoveries in the Eastern Mediterranean have triggered fierce energy competition among regional actors. The continental shelf delimitation agreement between the TRNC and Türkiye in 2011 has once again enhanced the strategic importance of the TRNC (Official Gazette of the Republic of Türkiye, 2011: p. 3). In particular, this agreement has allocated exploration areas to the Turkish Petroleum Corporation and has served as an alternative to the GCA's declaration

of an exclusive economic zone (EEZ) and unilateral delimitation of maritime boundaries with Egypt. From this perspective, the TRNC serves as an important energy security asset for Türkiye in its confrontation with the GCA, which has been seeking to increase its energy independence by expanding its EEZ. The TRNC's energy security is closely linked with the security of Türkiye. In particular, the submarine water supply project implemented in 2015 demonstrates that the connection with Türkiye is critical for the survival of the TRNC (Winrow, 2017: pp. 25-27). Electricity line projects are being developed to ensure the energy security of the TRNC (Winrow, 2017: pp. 25-27). From this perspective, it is possible to suggest that the TRNC serves as an extension of Türkiye's energy security in the Eastern Mediterranean.

The Eastern Mediterranean discoveries, including Israel's natural gas finds, have triggered an energy competition in the Eastern Mediterranean. The TRNC views the GCA's unilateral declaration of EEZ over Cyprus as an aggravation of tensions (Talmon, 2001: pp. 729-731). The TRNC interacts with other regional actors within the framework of three key geopolitical issues in the Eastern Mediterranean;

- Delimitation of maritime borders.
- Natural gas transportation corridors.
- The military strategic dimension.

Accordingly, the TRNC plays a critical role in Türkiye's energy security. From the Turkish perspective, the TRNC serves as the primary legal and political guarantor of Türkiye's claims in Cyprus, including the delimitation of maritime borders, as well as a deterrent against the GCA's energy initiatives (Yaycı, 2020: p. 102). Additionally, the TRNC presents an alternative to the EastMed pipeline project, which intends to transport Eastern Mediterranean gas directly to Greece, bypassing the TRNC. From this perspective, it is possible to suggest that the TRNC serves as a strategic geopolitical partner for Türkiye in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Although the TRNC's international recognition is limited, its geopolitical importance is critical. At the international level, the EU has promoted the international and diplomatic recognition of the GCA, which has reduced the attractiveness of the TRNC for international partners. At the same time, Türkiye's strategic interests in the Eastern Mediterranean, as well as its energy security, have increased the importance of the TRNC as a reliable ally against the GCA. Additionally, the strategic involvement of the US, France, and Russia in the Eastern Mediterranean has enhanced the importance of the TRNC for Türkiye. The geopolitical relevance of the TRNC has benefited from Türkiye's support as well as its location in Cyprus. At present, the TRNC has become a key regional player in Eastern Mediterranean energy geopolitics, which has also triggered energy competition with the GCA.

4.4. TRNC's Relations with Regional and Global Actors

Although the TRNC is not internationally recognized, it occupies a relatively

strong position in regional energy geopolitics. The Eastern Mediterranean discoveries have fueled energy competition among regional actors, including the TRNC. Given the TRNC's alliances, partnerships with great powers, international recognition, and relationships with multinational corporations, it is essential to discuss the TRNC's regional and global partnerships to highlight the country's importance in the energy geopolitics of the Eastern Mediterranean.

The TRNC occupies a strategically important location in Cyprus, which serves as a critical interest for Türkiye. Accordingly, the TRNC has become a priority for Türkiye to ensure its energy security by securing its border areas against potential energy-related security challenges. From this perspective, the TRNC's natural gas reserves can serve as a strategic energy security asset for Türkiye. The TRNC can serve as one of the critical pillars of stability in the Eastern Mediterranean for Türkiye. In particular, Türkiye participates in the ownership of the TRNC, including the Republic of Cyprus, as well as the delimitation agreements and infrastructure projects for natural gas transportation (Yaycı, 2020: p. 108). The alliances of the TRNC, including those with Türkiye, serve as a guarantee of security for the northern district of Cyprus. In particular, several military infrastructure projects have been initiated to enhance the national security of the TRNC, which also benefits Türkiye. The TRNC's alliance with Türkiye has the potential to serve as a balancing force against the GCA, which has been expanding its energy influence in the Eastern Mediterranean. From this perspective, the TRNC's military infrastructure projects can also serve to deter potential aggression from the GCA.

The EMGF serves as an institutional guarantor for gas trading and transportation, as well as the legal and economic framework for gas production and transit (Tsakiris, 2021: pp. 148-150). Accordingly, the EMGF excludes the TRNC from participating in the regional energy forum, which also indicates the lack of international recognition of the TRNC. From this perspective, it is possible to suggest that the EMGF institutionalized the isolation of the TRNC from the regional energy market.

The US plays a crucial role in the Eastern Mediterranean as a major energy and security actor. The Eastern Mediterranean benefits from the stability provided by the military presence established by the US in the framework of its foreign policy. Nevertheless, the US does not recognize the TRNC, and the US has been enhancing its strategic partnerships with the GCA in recent years. American multinational corporations have been playing a significant role in the energy sector of the GCA, which also demonstrates the US interest in the GCA as a reliable energy partner (U.S. Energy Information Administration [EIA], 2025: p. 4). The isolation of the TRNC from the US is also due to the lack of diplomatic recognition, which deprives the TRNC of the opportunity to benefit from the security provided by the US military presence. Accordingly, the TRNC has few alternatives to rely on for its security, which enhances the importance of Türkiye for the TRNC.

The EU has been enhancing its strategic presence in the Eastern Mediterranean by establishing stronger ties with the GCA. The EU supports the energy initiatives

of the GCA, which fit the Union's energy security strategy. At the same time, the EU does not recognize the TRNC, which limits the Republic's strategic opportunities with the EU (Delimatsis, 2021: p. 58). With limited international recognition, the TRNC finds itself in a vulnerable position to attract investors to its energy sector. In particular, the TRNC's renewable energy projects face significant barriers to accessing international financing, which limits the Republic's energy security. Russia has traditionally been an important economic partner for the GCA, but the TRNC does not benefit from strategic partnerships with Moscow. Similarly, China has shown interest in infrastructure projects in the Eastern Mediterranean, but so far, it has not demonstrated any energy-related initiatives for the TRNC. From this perspective, it is possible to conclude that the TRNC lacks international allies to enhance its energy security. Russia's relationship with China should be considered separately from its position in Cyprus. Although Moscow and Beijing have substantially deepened their energy cooperation, particularly in oil and natural gas, this broader Russo-Chinese relationship does not by itself demonstrate a Russian strategy of balancing China through Cyprus. In the Cyprus context, Russia's interests are better understood in terms of its wider regional position, relations with the Republic of Cyprus and Türkiye, and the implications of Eastern Mediterranean energy developments for European energy markets. Russia-China energy cooperation is, in fact, extensive: Russian gas exports to China via the Power of Siberia system reached 38.8 bcm in 2025, and additional Russian-Chinese gas cooperation is developing.

In the context of international law, the UN Security Council does not recognize the TRNC (Crawford, 2006: p. 393). The international prestige of the TRNC is low, which limits its influence in the international arena. This situation affects the TRNC's energy sector, licensing agreements, and access to dispute resolution mechanisms. The TRNC's exclusion from the international energy markets reduces the Republic's energy security. From the perspective of energy geopolitics, it becomes difficult to speak of the TRNC as an international actor.

Energy corporations, including Total Energies, Eni, and ExxonMobil, are traditional partners for natural gas production in the Eastern Mediterranean. However, these corporations prefer the GCA as a reliable partner, while negotiations with the TRNC are complicated by international recognition issues. In particular, the TRNC's legal sovereignty is not recognized by international institutions, which complicates the enforceability of contracts with international corporations in international arbitration courts (Ker-Lindsay, 2011: p. 159). Nevertheless, corporate behavior is to a certain extent dictated by geopolitics. In particular, international recognition of the GCA by the EU and the US, as well as the deteriorating international reputation of the TRNC, creates unfavorable conditions for doing business for corporations operating in Cyprus. According to Ker-Lindsay (2011: p. 159), corporations prefer a predictable legal and political framework, which, in the case of the TRNC, is not available to them. Accordingly, corporations are reluctant to contract with the TRNC, which undermines the Republic's energy se-

curity. Nevertheless, the TRNC is far from being a powerless actor in Eastern Mediterranean energy geopolitics. Despite the lack of opportunities, its strategic importance for Türkiye, as well as its opposition to the GCA, enhances the relevance of the TRNC in the regional energy competition.

5. Comparative Analysis of the Energy Strategies of the North and GCA

5.1. The Role of Regional Actors and Their Approaches to Cyprus: Different Strategic Values

The discovery and development of offshore hydrocarbon resources in the Eastern Mediterranean have made Cyprus a focal point not only of the Cyprus issue but also of broader regional energy competition. Türkiye, Greece, Israel, and Egypt are key regional actors, each attaching significant strategic importance to Cyprus while pursuing distinct energy, security, and foreign policy objectives. Therefore, an analysis of the role played by Southern and Northern Cyprus in the energy geopolitics of the Eastern Mediterranean region is critical to understanding the strategic role of the island state in the great game of energy.

For Türkiye, Cyprus is a strategic ally, which has historic, legal, and security significance. Türkiye does not view the Cyprus dispute as an exclusively bilateral issue between Greek and Turkish Cypriots but rather as a matter of Turkish sovereignty and national security. The discovery of natural gas in the Eastern Mediterranean from the late 2000s has increased Ankara's interest in the Eastern Mediterranean as a whole, which has accelerated the development of the Blue Homeland strategy (Trends Research and Advisory, 2020). Türkiye objects to the unilateral declaration of the GCA's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and the exclusive natural gas exploration and production rights on the grounds that these actions violate the rights of Turkish Cypriots. Accordingly, by concluding an agreement on demarcating EEZs with Northern Cyprus, Ankara expresses its official position on the dispute over Cyprus. The strategy that Türkiye is pursuing in Cyprus illustrates the importance of the energy issue for Türkiye: energy resources have become one of the main political and strategic priorities for Ankara. Türkiye's natural gas interests are located in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea, where Türkiye has begun to position itself as an energy bridge to Europe (Çakır, 2023: pp. 113-116). Consequently, resolving the Cyprus issue is strategically important for Türkiye as it will enable Ankara to become a regional energy hub and significantly reshape Türkiye's strategic partnership with Europe.

Cyprus is also of great importance to Greece, both strategically and economically. Given Greece's status as an EU member state, Greece and GCA are developing a converging energy policy, which is based on international law, confronting Türkiye's energy interventionism in the Eastern Mediterranean region. The tripartite and quadripartite summits with Israel and Egypt, which aim to deter Türkiye's energy interventionism in the Eastern Mediterranean, symbolize Greece's and Cyprus's shared strategic vision (Tagliapietra, 2017: pp. 90-93). The GCA

plays the role of a strategic ally for Greece in the Eastern Mediterranean region, acting as a guarantor of Greece's foreign policy with regard to Türkiye. Northern Cyprus, in its turn, is not recognized as a strategic partner by Greece.

For Israel, Cyprus is the key country in terms of energy security. The discovery of natural gas reserves in Israel's Leviathan and Tamar fields has stimulated Israel's energy sector development, making the issue of energy cooperation with neighboring countries a priority. GCA is Israel's strategic partner in terms of infrastructure development for natural gas transportation and energy security. Having been confronted with Türkiye's uncompromising foreign policy since 2010, Israel has turned to Cyprus and Greece for strategic partnerships (Öniş & Yılmaz, 2016: p. 83). Nevertheless, Israel cannot rule out the alternative of natural gas transit via Türkiye due to the cost effectiveness of this solution; therefore, Israel's Cyprus policy is also based on the balance of interests.

Egypt is one of the few Eastern Mediterranean countries that possess LNG infrastructure. The discovery of natural gas in the Zohr field has enabled Egypt to consolidate its position as a regional gas producer. Under the energy cooperation initiative with Cyprus, Egypt has the opportunity to liquefy Cypriot natural gas at Egyptian terminals to resell it in international markets (IEA, 2019: pp. 21-24). GCA plays the role of a strategic partner for Egypt in the Eastern Mediterranean region as well, facilitating Egypt's access to international markets through natural gas. The initiative to establish the East Mediterranean Gas Forum with its headquarters in Cairo reflects Egypt's intention to consolidate its position as a regional energy center in the Eastern Mediterranean (Tagliapietra, 2017: p. 16). Thus, Egypt shares Greece's and Israel's strategic vision regarding Cyprus. In Egypt's Cyprus policy, Northern Cyprus is not considered a strategic partner, whereas GCA is Egypt's priority in terms of energy security.

Regional actors' strategic roles are determined by the principles of energy security, territorial integrity, and strategic rivalry. Türkiye views Northern Cyprus as its strategic ally in the Eastern Mediterranean region, pursuing its national interests both regionally and globally, whereas GCA is regarded as an obstacle to Türkiye's expansionist intentions. At the same time, Greece, Israel, and Egypt see GCA as a reliable strategic partner in the Eastern Mediterranean region, which is consistent with their energy security, geopolitical, and legal interests. Energy resources are of great importance for these countries, as they serve as a strategic lever of influence. Consequently, energy resources play a crucial role in the foreign policy of regional and global energy consumers, fueling strategic rivalries in the Eastern Mediterranean region (Yergin, 2011: pp. 321-325). In this vein, Cyprus has become a trigger for strategic rivalries in the Eastern Mediterranean region, being both the goal and the means of confrontation between states.

5.2. The Role of Global Actors and the Energy Security Perspective

The offshore natural gas resources discovered in the Eastern Mediterranean have drawn the attention of many global energy consumers, and Cyprus has become

the focal point of the great game of energy. Given the energy security importance of Cyprus for the world's leading powers, it is of great interest to explore how the EU, the US, the UK, Russia, and China incorporate Southern and Northern Cyprus into their energy strategies. Consequently, there is a need to assess how the GCA fits into the strategic vision of energy security for global consumers.

GCA plays a special role for the EU, derived from its status as an EU member state and its geostrategic location as a potential energy bridge to the Eastern Mediterranean. Energy security is one of the key priorities of the EU's foreign policy, and the Union has implemented a policy of resource and transit diversification (European Commission, 2020: p. 47). In this vein, GCA has the potential to become an alternative supplier of natural gas to the EU, and the GCA has the status of a legitimate energy resource under international law. From the EU's perspective, Cyprus has the potential to become an energy bridge, which will transmit the principles of international law to the Eastern Mediterranean region with regard to energy resource distribution (Tocci, 2004: pp. 109-112). In addition, the EU recognizes only the GCA de jure; therefore, in terms of energy resources, the EU pursues a policy of legal and extralegal energy security, which is based on international law. From the EU's perspective, Northern Cyprus is viewed as an opportunity to settle the Cyprus dispute by exploiting energy resources as an economic stimulus for Greece and Türkiye to normalize their geopolitical and economic interactions (Tocci, 2004: pp. 109-112).

The foreign policy of the US in the Eastern Mediterranean is multifaceted, encompassing not only energy security issues but also the maintenance of regional stability. The ExxonMobil Company's presence on the territory of Cyprus has given the US an additional strategic advantage in terms of accessing the energy resources of Cyprus. By facilitating the tripartite energy cooperation between GCA, Greece, and Israel, the US aims to promote Eastern Mediterranean energy resources to the European energy market (Tagliapietra, 2017: pp. 18-20). At the same time, the US does not want to alienate Türkiye. Therefore, the foreign policy of the US in Cyprus is based on the principles of balancing. According to this strategy, the US views GCA as a reliable strategic partner in terms of energy security, whereas the US holds a reserved position in regard to Northern Cyprus due to its special relationship with Türkiye.

The UK's interests in Cyprus are dictated by the military needs of NATO, as well as the Middle East and Eastern Mediterranean regions' security. The UK's military presence in Cyprus in the form of the sovereign base areas of Akrotiri and Dhekelia plays a crucial role for the UK both regionally and globally (Williams, 2013: pp. 52-55). In regard to Cyprus, the foreign policy of the UK is also based on the principles of balancing between Greece and Türkiye, taking into account international law in Cyprus policy decisions. From the perspective of energy security, Cyprus plays a secondary role for the UK as a strategic location. The UK does not recognize Northern Cyprus, considering it a tool of Turkish regional dominance. Thus, GCA enables the UK to adhere to the status quo in Cyprus,

which is consistent with the UN resolutions on Cyprus (Keser, 2006: pp. 132-134).

From Russia's perspective, the Eastern Mediterranean region is a strategically important one, the energy resources of which directly compete with Russia's natural gas exports to the European continent. Given this, Russia is interested in the development of natural gas resources in order to satisfy its domestic demand for energy resources and to profit from the sales of its natural gas to international markets. In addition, Russia is trying to hinder the EU's initiative to develop an alternative source of natural gas supply. GCA has traditionally been a strategic partner for Russia, which has enabled Russia to expand its economic and, consequently, energy potential (Yergin, 2011: pp. 336-340). Nevertheless, Russia's competition with Israel for energy resources has limited Russia's opportunities to influence the development of energy relations in the Eastern Mediterranean region. Russian energy companies possess limited economic involvement in Cyprus. Russia does not recognize Northern Cyprus and adheres to a pragmatic approach in regard to Cyprus, considering international law in its Cyprus policy (Öniş & Yilmaz, 2016: pp. 88-90). Russia's energy policy in Cyprus is focused on counteracting the expansion of the influence of Western energy companies in the European market.

The Eastern Mediterranean region serves as a strategic route for China's international trade, and the discovery of offshore natural gas resources around Cyprus has stimulated China to expand its economic ties with the GCA. Despite China's limited economic involvement in the development of Cyprus's natural gas resources, China considers Cyprus a strategic partner in terms of international trade and finance. By developing economic, transport, and energy ties with Cyprus, China pursues the goal of expanding its economic presence in the Eastern Mediterranean region as a rising global power. China does not recognize Northern Cyprus, and accordingly, it conducts its foreign policy in Cyprus via the GCA in accordance with the principles of geopolitical realism. According to China's strategic vision, energy resources serve as a lever of economic influence, and geopolitical confrontation with either Türkiye or Greece is undesirable.

It is necessary to make a distinction between the strategic and political interests in Cyprus and active participation in the development of the Cypriot energy sector, which is the basis of its economy. For the EU, Cyprus is a source of additional gas, as well as a transit corridor for electricity and gas. At the same time, the Republic of Cyprus is also developing its gas sector with the involvement of American companies. Although Russia has long been interested in Cyprus, both politically and economically, it has remained a marginal player in the development of Cypriot offshore gas fields. In turn, China has shown the greatest economic and strategic interest in Cyprus. Therefore, it is useful to consider the varying degrees of involvement of individual countries in the Cypriot energy sector. Thus, while the US influences Cyprus in two areas, strategic partnerships and direct economic participation, Russian and Chinese interests are more relevant to the strategic and economic aspects of the relationship with Cyprus. For the EU, GCA is an oppor-

tunity to secure alternative natural gas supplies, whereas for the US, it is a chance to stabilize the Eastern Mediterranean region and ensure energy security. For the UK, Cyprus plays a strategically important role as a military base, while for Russia, Cyprus has strategic significance within the broader Eastern Mediterranean and European energy security environment. The development of alternative Eastern Mediterranean gas supplies may have implications for Russia's traditional position in European gas markets, but this should be distinguished from direct Russian commercial participation in Cypriot gas development. In its turn, China's interest in Cyprus is primarily associated with trade, investment, infrastructure, logistics, and broader connectivity. Although Chinese companies have participated in energy-related infrastructure initiatives, such involvement should not be equated with direct participation in the upstream development of Cyprus's offshore natural gas resources. China's role is therefore better characterized as an economic and infrastructure-oriented component of Cyprus's broader geopolitical environment rather than as a principal actor in Cypriot gas production.

The distinction between political interest and direct energy sector participation is essential for assessing the geopolitical significance of external actors in Cyprus. The United States has combined strategic engagement with substantial participation by U.S.-linked energy companies in offshore exploration and development. Russia, by contrast, has maintained important political and economic interests in Cyprus without becoming a major direct participant in the island's offshore gas projects. China's role has been more closely associated with infrastructure, investment, trade, and connectivity than with upstream gas production. Consequently, the presence of a global actor in Cyprus's geopolitical environment should not automatically be interpreted as evidence of direct involvement in the country's hydrocarbon sector.

Unlike the more indirect forms of involvement associated with some external actors, U.S. participation in Cyprus's energy sector includes direct commercial engagement. U.S.-linked companies have participated in offshore exploration and development, most notably through Chevron's involvement in the Aphrodite field and ExxonMobil's participation in exploration activities. This commercial involvement operates alongside broader U.S.-Cyprus strategic cooperation on Eastern Mediterranean energy security.

5.3. The Impact of Northern and GCA's Energy Geopolitics on Their Foreign Policies

The discovery of offshore natural gas resources has contributed to the divergence between the foreign policy approaches of Northern and Southern Cyprus. Energy diplomacy enables the GCA to strengthen its international legitimacy, while for Northern Cyprus, energy resources signify strategic convergence with Türkiye. The GCA, by promoting its energy resources in international organizations and participating in strategic energy cooperation with Greece, Israel, and Egypt, has been able to position itself as a strategic ally of Western countries. Thus, the GCA ad-

heres to a foreign policy that is consistent with international law. The creation of the East Mediterranean Gas Forum, which unites energy companies from Greece, Israel, Egypt, and Cyprus, is strategically important for the GCA. This initiative has provided a foundation for the shift of the GCA towards Western countries, thereby facilitating the GCA's international legitimacy (Tagliapietra, 2017: pp. 14-18).

Within the framework of strategic energy diplomacy, GCA has diversified its defense capabilities by strengthening military and security ties with subsequent member France, the US, and Israel. In particular, a military alliance with the French energy company Total Energies has enhanced France's military presence in the Eastern Mediterranean region (Stein, 2018: pp. 47-49). Northern Cyprus relies on Türkiye's military presence in the Eastern Mediterranean as a guarantee of its energy security: Türkiye's naval assets and aircraft serve as a deterrent against a potential attack by Greece and GCA (Aydın-Düzgit & Tocci, 2015: pp. 35-38). Therefore, by relying on Türkiye's military potential, Northern Cyprus secures its defense capabilities and strategic interests.

The discovery of offshore natural gas resources has profound national security implications for both Cyprus segments. GCA has concluded military assistance and defense agreements with the US and France (Tagliapietra, 2017: p. 28). Northern Cyprus, in its turn, has secured its defense by relying on Türkiye's military power, which is based on Türkiye's energy diplomacy in the Eastern Mediterranean region. Thus, energy resources have become a critical element of the defense policy of both Cyprus segments.

Within the framework of energy diplomacy, the distribution of revenues from energy resources has become a crucial point in the Cyprus dispute. GCA has put forward the idea that under any federal settlement, all Republic of Cyprus revenues found within the territory of Cyprus must be distributed among all Cypriots. Northern Cyprus, in its turn, suggests establishing a joint committee and a joint management system for revenues generated from offshore hydrocarbon resources (Tocci, 2004: pp. 111-114). GCA has demonstrated a more pragmatic approach to the settlement of inter-Cypriot disputes, guided by strategic considerations rather than legal norms. In this vein, energy resources serve as a strategic tool for both segments of Cyprus, enabling them to pursue their national interests. The existence of Republic of Cyprus reserves has the potential to aggravate inter-Cypriot relations, which was confirmed by their discovery in 2011 (Yergin, 2011: pp. 321-325). For instance, GCA's participation in the East Mediterranean Gas Forum and the tripartite energy agreements concluded with Greece and Israel illustrate this point.

The GCA has leveraged its energy potential to advance its strategic interests vis-à-vis the US and the EU, which has enabled it to strengthen its foreign policy position. Northern Cyprus, guided by strategic considerations, has adopted a more pragmatic approach to energy diplomacy, relying on Türkiye's strategic vision. Türkiye's energy diplomacy in relation to Russia, embodied in strategic natural gas trade, as well as Türkiye's economic engagement with China, influences

Northern Cyprus's energy policy (Chen, 2019: pp. 90-93). Therefore, Northern Cyprus plays an indirect role in the great game of energy between global consumers. At the same time, leveraging its energy potential, the GCA has enhanced its international legitimacy, whereas Northern Cyprus has pursued a strategic and pragmatic approach to energy diplomacy through its alliances with Türkiye.

5.4. An Evaluation of Cooperation and Conflict Issues

The natural gas finds in the Eastern Mediterranean have turned Cyprus into the focal point of the great powers' geopolitical game. The energy sharing agreements, trade routes, and pipeline relations are critical factors which impact the level of cooperation and competition between regional and global energy consumers. The initiatives to develop energy infrastructure and the associated disputes over delimitation influence the foreign policy strategies of states both regionally and globally.

The discovery of offshore natural gas deposits in the Eastern Mediterranean has made Cyprus a crossroads of international and regional geopolitical interests. At the same time, however, it is important to recognize that Cyprus's role in the sphere of energy should be considered in the context of its current status as a producing entity. The discovery of resources, the delimitation disputes, the licensing and exploration capabilities, as well as the infrastructure and export opportunities, are the factors that determine the status of the Republic of Cyprus as a region with potential. Thus, neither the Turkish nor the Greek Cyprus administered regions should be considered major producers, but rather entities with varying degrees of involvement in the emerging energy-rich environment.

The Republic of Cyprus (RoC) possesses the licensing and regulatory authority over the continental shelf, which includes highly prospective gas fields. It has already signed several agreements with international energy companies, which have explored the Aphrodite Field and have the option to develop it further. From this perspective, it is possible to suggest that the Republic of Cyprus is a region with immense potential for economic and strategic growth. At the same time, it is essential to recognize the fact that the mere presence and even substantial finds of hydrocarbon resources do not guarantee their production and sale. Further investment, appraisal, and infrastructure developments are needed to transport the gas from offshore facilities to processing stations and to ensure that there is demand for the given product.

Meanwhile, the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) does not possess a similar status due to the lack of international recognition as well as licensing authority. Therefore, its role in the sphere of energy is mostly speculative. Nevertheless, Northern Cyprus has the status of a political entity with strong ties to Türkiye, which has both exploratory and strategic interests in the Eastern Mediterranean. Therefore, the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus is a region with significant political and strategic value and limited production status.

The third factor to consider is the infrastructure, which is of crucial importance

in defining the status of Cyprus as a producer of natural gas. The RoC has several options available, including the utilization of the Egyptian gas and LNG infrastructure, the laying of trans-Mediterranean pipelines, or the building of electricity networks. Each of these options has varying economic, infrastructural, and strategic implications, which will determine the future role of Cyprus in the Eastern Mediterranean. Thus, the Republic of Cyprus is a region with considerable opportunities and strategic significance, but it is unclear whether any of the current export options will become economically viable.

Therefore, the analysis suggests that Cyprus is a region with considerable strategic value but limited immediate production potential. In other words, the Republic of Cyprus is a territory with significant opportunities and potential for economic growth, which requires time, energy, and investment to yield substantial rewards. From this perspective, it is only fair to suggest that, as a geopolitical entity with international ties, Cyprus has economic and strategic opportunities and the potential to become a major player in the Eastern Mediterranean energy sector. At the same time, the political division of the country has led to an increase in both the competitive and collaborative aspects of the Cyprus dispute. The East Mediterranean Gas Forum, gas transportation schemes, electricity exchange networks, and the respective diplomatic initiatives serve both collaborative and competitive interests, which are the primary drivers of international relations between Cyprus and its neighboring countries.

Given the potential development of offshore natural gas resources around Cyprus, energy-resource development and associated transportation infrastructure have strategic importance for the foreign policies of the stakeholders involved. The development of natural gas infrastructure, including Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum initiatives, the EastMed pipeline, and electricity interconnections, can become a catalyst for geopolitical and strategic partnerships in the Eastern Mediterranean. At the same time, the disagreements over delimitation and associated exclusive trading rights, as well as the formation of exclusive energy consumer blocs, have the potential to trigger confrontations. Therefore, the platform for establishing an inclusive energy trading route is the most viable option to ensure energy security, as well as to settle the Cyprus dispute.

6. Conclusion

The article compares the energy strategies, as well as the foreign policy preferences, of both the TRNC and the GCA, and provides insight into the geopolitical implications of these strategies at regional and international levels. The research's key conclusion was that the natural gas finds in the Eastern Mediterranean turned the Cyprus issue from a purely political conflict into a multifaceted geopolitical confrontation.

To begin with, according to the article, the GCA was capitalizing on its international recognition and its status as a member state of the EU to advance its energy security agenda as a foreign policy tool. Consequently, the energy-related

agreements with allies such as Greece, Israel, and Egypt formalized the strategic energy security partnerships, which enhanced the GCA's foreign policy legitimacy as an EU member state. In other words, the energy sector became deeply intertwined with military security alliances, which bolstered the GCA's energy dominance. By contrast, the TRNC's energy policy is limited by its lack of international recognition, which constrains its foreign policy options. In other words, the TRNC's energy policy is guided by its reliance on the Blue Homeland doctrine, which is promoted by Türkiye. Overall, the key distinction between the energy doctrines of the TRNC and GCA is manifested in the interrelation between their foreign policy and international legitimacy.

Another crucial finding of the research is that the disagreements related to energy resources can become a catalyst for both cooperation and competition between the warring states. For example, as the article notes, the federation's supporters recognize the economic benefits of forming an energy market. Nonetheless, the economic considerations are offset by the political tensions which impede the collaborative initiatives, as both sides seek to advance their strategic and geopolitical interests. In other words, the discovery of offshore natural gas resources produced a rift, which amplified the Cyprus issue, intensified by the international community's involvement. Although Eastern Mediterranean natural gas can contribute to the EU's diversification of energy supplies, its contribution should not be overstated. The relatively limited and still-developing production base, the time and capital required for offshore development, dependence on export infrastructure, and uncertainty surrounding proposed transportation routes constrain the extent to which Cypriot gas can substantially transform European energy security. Its more realistic significance lies in providing an additional source of supply and diversification alongside other energy sources and routes. The bloc views Türkiye and the TRNC as geopolitical rivals which threaten the territorial integrity of the GCA and, by extension, the EU's cohesion. Cypriot and wider Eastern Mediterranean gas could make a supplementary contribution to European energy diversification, but its actual impact is constrained by resource volumes, development timelines, infrastructure requirements, export economics, and the feasibility of transportation routes. The Eastern Mediterranean is of interest to the United States, Russia, China, and the European Union, but each actor plays a different role in this region. American involvement in Cyprus-related offshore energy issues is based on strategic partnerships and direct corporate participation. Russia is interested in Cyprus and faces competition with other countries in the Eastern Mediterranean region, but at the moment, its involvement in the Cypriot offshore gas industry is insignificant. China's interest in Cyprus seems to be driven by investment, infrastructure, and trade factors, rather than energy resources. Therefore, it is reasonable to say that the degree of geopolitical interest is not proportional to the level of direct involvement in Cyprus's energy development. Overall, the presence of multinational energy companies and international strategic partnerships turned the Cyprus issue into a geopolitical contest between several states, which

poses a challenge to resolving the Cyprus dispute.

While the Eastern Mediterranean's natural gas resources create a rift between the GCA and the TRNC, they also present economic opportunities which can be used to advance the framework for political compromise. The article revealed that the GCA adheres to the foreign policy of promoting its energy security agenda to ensure its status as an EU member state. By contrast, the TRNC's foreign policy is inseparable from the role of Türkiye in the Eastern Mediterranean. In other words, the asymmetry of the foreign policy doctrines of the TRNC and GCA underscores the opportunity for international mediation to facilitate political and economic compromise. Therefore, the settlement of the Cyprus dispute hinges on the international community's ability to encourage mutual economic benefits from energy resource sharing, facilitated by diplomatic assurances, military security alliances, and multilateral partnerships. Only then will natural gas stop being the catalyst for political and economic confrontation between the TRNC and GCA and turn into the cornerstone of economic development.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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