

Chapter 1

The Future of Conflicts and Energy in the Mediterranean

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A. Introduction

For millennia, the Mediterranean has been a cradle of civilisations – a basin of cultural, political and economic interactions. It has also been a crucible of unyielding conflicts among myriad political forces. Situated at the crossroads between Africa, Asia and Europe, the Mediterranean remains of great geostrategic significance, connecting the East to the West through the Suez Canal and the Strait of Gibraltar. Today, it is home to some of the most enduring conflicts in the world, including the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Cypriot question, the tensions between Greece and Türkiye, the conflict in the Western Sahara, and more recent conflicts and disputes in Syria, Libya, Tunisia and Lebanon. Mercifully, the kaleidoscope of escalation between Türkiye, on the one hand, and Israel, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), on the other, are on the decline.

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The oil and gas windfalls have heightened tensions around possible discoveries in contested areas and are intensified further by long-running geopolitical rivalries.

Alongside these enduring tensions, new energy resources are being discovered in the Mediterranean¹ at a time of contested claims over Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) and intense competition over energy routes within and beyond the region. These discoveries are critical since most Mediterranean countries are dependent on external hydrocarbon resources. The oil and gas potential of the region is estimated to be around 5 billion barrels and 13.5 trillion cubic metres, respectively – valued at approximately \$500 billion at current prices – with resources discovered so far constituting a small portion of the estimated potential. Algeria has the highest reserves amongst the Mediterranean countries followed by Egypt, Libya, Syria and Israel. These projected windfalls have heightened tensions around possible discoveries in contested areas and are intensified further by long-running geopolitical rivalries. Made worse, parties in many of these conflicts perceive their disputes as zero-sum games with outcomes significantly impacting the balance of power within and beyond the Mediterranean. The countries with substantial energy exports and strategic export routes will possess greater power and influence resulting in a high-stakes geopolitical game with real potential for spiralling into military confrontations.

The fierce geopolitical rivalry over power and influence as protracted conflicts became linked with new tensions surrounding maritime boundaries and energy discoveries created a vicious cycle of two mutually reinforcing conflict dynamics feeding into one another. This pattern is further complicated by seven evolving trends: (1) the war in Ukraine is heightening tensions associated with energy and energy routes; (2) Mediterranean countries are mostly adopting positions on energy issues based on their conflict-associated interests and their political alliances; (3) most governments are adopting unrealistic maximalist positions; (4) several countries are competing in what they perceive as a zero-sum game to become a leading power in the basin; (5) several conflicts have become more inextricably linked; (6) countries from the basin are soliciting support from their

¹ The discoveries of the Israeli Tamar and Leviathan fields in 2009 and 2010, the world's largest deep-sea natural gas discoveries in that period, attracted international attention to the Mediterranean. This was followed by the discoveries of the Cypriot Aphrodite field in 2011 and the Egyptian Zohr field in 2015, leading to further international attention.

allies beyond the region, leading to involvement from the US, the EU, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and the Arab Gulf taking sides and affecting the dynamics of the conflicts; and (7) almost all the conflicts and critical aspects thereof currently lack a negotiating platform to resolve them.

This chapter will address these intersecting trends, and how the energy dimension affects several conflicts in the Mediterranean – the Cypriot question, Greece-Türkiye, Israel-Lebanon, and the Western Sahara. It will consider how countries are cooperating, competing or strategising in response to their adversaries, how energy may intensify ongoing conflicts, and whether maritime border/energy negotiations can be leveraged to reduce tensions, advance cooperation, and promote peacemaking in the basin. If agreements similar to the one between Lebanon and Israel are reached, they will not constitute a panacea for these conflicts. However, they can contribute to de-escalating tensions and can be built on to advance the prospects of peace.

B. The Cypriot question, the Turkish-Greek conflict, and the situation in Libya

The conflicts between Türkiye and Greece, the Cypriot question, and the situation in Libya have become a central arena in the Mediterranean basin's power struggle, demonstrating the mutually reinforcing nature of political/energy disputes.

Türkiye lies at the heart of the three conflicts. President Erdoğan's aggressive diplomacy² has spurred several countries to seek to isolate him.

- With Egypt, Erdoğan, in the context of his policy of supporting Islamic political forces in the region in general, provided strong support for the Muslim Brotherhood following the 2011 revolution and was quite critical of President Sisi after the late President Morsi was deposed in 2013.
- Erdoğan launched attacks on Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman after the killing of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi in Istanbul.
- He was on a collision course with the UAE because Türkiye supported Islamist political forces since the Arab revolutions began in 2010.
- Türkiye also had recurring tensions with Israel, withdrawing its ambassador in 2010 after Israeli commandos attacked a Turkish aid flotilla that aimed at breaking Israel's blockade on Gaza. Tensions also spiked in 2018, following deadly Israeli-Palestinian confrontations in Gaza after the march of return clashes.

² The failed coup against Erdoğan in July 2016 and what he rightly considered a lack of support from the US and other NATO allies cemented his resolve to assert Türkiye's role as an influential regional power.

These Turkish policies resulted in an alliance of these countries that were supported by deeper partnerships with Greece, Cyprus and France.

In implementing its strategy to enhance its influence in the region, Türkiye took several steps that exacerbated tensions and had significant implications in the East Mediterranean, Libya and the Horn of Africa:

- Türkiye signed a maritime agreement with the Turkish Cypriots in 2011.
- It signed two agreements with Libya's former Government of National Accord (GNA), one regarding the Delimitation of Maritime Jurisdiction Areas in the Mediterranean, and the second on Security and Military Cooperation leading to significant escalation.
- It signed an agreement with Qatar and deployed around 3,000 Turkish troops there in 2014, amidst the conflict between Qatar and Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain and Egypt.
- It opened a military training facility in Somalia in September 2017.
- It was reported that Türkiye reached an agreement with Sudan in 2018 to lease and construct a dual-use civilian and naval facility in the Suakin port on the Red Sea. While Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the UAE have raised deep concerns that Türkiye is expanding its military foothold in the Red Sea, Ankara has denied any military dimension to Türkiye's presence in this arena.

The current phase of the Cypriot question can be traced to the aftermath of the 1974 Turkish invasion of Northern Cyprus. Further north, the enmity between Türkiye and Greece has endured for many decades. Relations fluctuated and are now at an extremely low point over apparent Greek militarisation of islands close to Turkish shores, maritime boundaries, the Cypriot question, Libya, and immigration³. They have recently come close to a military confrontation.

On the energy front, both Greece and Cyprus claim that Türkiye is illegally performing exploration and drilling activities within their respective unilaterally declared EEZs and blame Türkiye for the escalation of tensions. Cyprus argues that it legitimately represents the whole island and has a sovereign right to explore and develop its natural resources and that the Turkish Cypriots have no authority to issue licences. Cyprus further argues that all Cypriots will benefit from energy revenues if Türkiye recognises its sovereign right over the island's energy resources. Cyprus has raised objections with the UN and the EU over Türkiye's activities in Cypriot waters. As for Greece, it argues that the Greek islands are entitled to claim an EEZ.

³ Türkiye regularly accuses Greece of pushing back migrants entering the country by land and sea. Türkiye's coast-guard frequently shares videos of such pushbacks. Greece accuses Türkiye, which hosts the largest number of refugees in the world, of pushing forward migrants to put pressure on the EU (Fraser, 2022).



Türkiye argues that Greece is using its sovereignty over the islands located a few kilometres south of the Turkish coast to claim huge areas of the East Mediterranean within its EEZ and confine Türkiye to the Bay of Iskenderun. It in turn objects to the EEZ claims of both Greece and Cyprus, arguing that they are trying to exclude Türkiye and Turkish Cypriots from reaping the benefits of their oil and gas resources. Turkish Cypriots argue that they should have a say in managing the island's resources. Policies that reflect the maximalist positions taken by different parties.

Türkiye's growing isolation, coupled with pressure on the Libyan Government of National Accord (GNA) from General Haftar's military campaign, led Türkiye and the GNA to sign a maritime boundary agreement and a military cooperation memorandum of understanding (MoU). The maritime agreement allowed Türkiye to claim its EEZ as it relates to Libya, largely ignoring Greek, Cypriot and Egyptian maritime claims towards Türkiye and Libya. The agreement was immediately dismissed by the three countries and is not recognised by the US and the EU. Furthermore, Turkish military support helped the GNA forces push Haftar's forces back to Sirte, provoking Egypt's President Sisi to declare Sirte as a red line in June 2020, implying that crossing it would trigger an Egyptian intervention. An intense international effort produced a ceasefire and a demilitarised buffer zone around Sirte in October 2020. The fragile ceasefire has mostly been maintained, and negotiations to hold Libyan elections have started, but later stalled with tensions persisting and progress remains elusive.

In the energy arena, Türkiye has pressed its claims through a three-pronged approach: (1) Türkiye has carried out exploration activities in contested areas with Greece and Cyprus, including areas where the Turkish Cypriots have licensed the Turkish Petroleum Corporation to work. In October 2020, Türkiye sent a seismic vessel accompanied by naval vessels to areas contested with Greece, a move vehemently opposed and called illegal by Greece. It also sent exploration ships escorted by naval vessels into Cypriot waters; (2) by way of gunboat diplomacy, Türkiye prevented other countries from exploring contested areas. In February 2018, the Turkish navy forced the withdrawal of an Eni drill ship before it could reach its destination in Cypriot waters; (3) Türkiye is opposing the construction of gas pipelines from most of its rivals producing gas to Europe relying on the maritime boundaries agreed with Libya's GNA as most will need to pass through its EEZ delineated in this agreement.

Türkiye's rivals have been unyielding, taking multiple steps to counter Erdoğan's approach:

1. Politically, France and Egypt have deepened their partnership and opposed Turkish policies, including its role in Libya. They have been supported by Saudi Arabia and the UAE that have advanced cooperation with Greece, Cyprus and Israel (in the case of the UAE). The Saudi and Emirati attitudes have not

changed significantly despite the recent rapprochement between the two countries and Türkiye. Furthermore, support was solicited beyond the region. France and Italy placed the EU and Türkiye’s already complicated relationship on an adversarial track. The EU repeatedly called on Türkiye to halt exploration activities and de-escalate tension, a position echoed by the US⁴ and others.

2. Militarily, when a Turkish and Greek warship collided in August 2020, it became clear that tensions may spiral into a military confrontation. Supporting Greece, France sent its fighter jets and dispatched its flagship Charles de Gaulle nuclear aircraft carrier to the area.
3. Economically, Cyprus, Egypt, Greece, Israel, Italy, Jordan and Palestine established the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF), which France joined later⁵. The EU, the US, and the World Bank joined as observers. Türkiye was excluded from this new organisation. Furthermore, Israel, which was previously considering an Israel-Türkiye undersea gas pipeline, agreed to supply gas to Egypt’s liquefied natural gas (LNG) plants for export following a similar move by Cyprus.

Germany mediated between Greece and Türkiye with US and EU support to defuse the rising tensions. While no breakthroughs were achieved, and Türkiye has called Germany’s impartiality into question, Erdoğan, feeling diplomatically isolated and facing an economic crisis and the 2023 election, took steps with relative success to thaw Türkiye’s strained relations with Israel, Egypt, the UAE and Saudi Arabia.

C. The Israeli-Lebanese maritime boundary

The Israeli Lebanese conflict can be traced back to the 1948 Arab Israeli war. Forces were separated through the armistice agreement signed in March 1949 along Lebanon’s borders with Palestine, with Israel controlling territory far beyond that allocated to it under the UN Partition Plan. However, the armistice agreements signed at the time were not peace treaties that outlined final borders or ended the conflict. Lebanon was not a party to the 1967 Arab-Israeli war but absorbed a wave of Palestinian refugees because of the war. Since then, a series of wars and military clashes involving Israel, Lebanon, Syria, Palestine and various militias have taken place and the two countries remain in a state of war. However, despite the protracted nature of the Israel-Lebanon conflict, in recent years, the US has played a crucial mediating role, finally succeeding in brokering



4 US State Department Spokesperson Morgan Ortagus stated that: “The US remains deeply concerned by Türkiye’s repeated attempts to conduct drilling operations... This provocative step raises tensions in the region... We urge Turkish authorities to halt these operations... We continue to believe the island’s oil and gas resources should be equitably shared between both communities” (Ortagus, 2019).

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an agreement on Israel-Lebanon maritime boundaries in October 2022. One of the main achievements of this agreement is that it helped avoid a possible military confrontation. It was also a win-win agreement, and it has the potential to build confidence and open the door for possible progress towards Israeli-Lebanese peace.

Importantly, the Israel-Lebanon agreement will create new realities on the ground and represents a success story that can be replicated in other Mediterranean disputes. Even before the signing of the Israel-Lebanon agreement, Cyprus and Israel agreed to speedily resolve a long-running dispute on exploiting a gas reservoir that straddles their maritime boundaries. Press reports indicate that a formula was found for the demarcation of the Lebanese-Cypriot maritime boundaries and that Egypt may be near a deal with the Israelis and the Palestinians to revive the Gaza offshore gas field. The president of Lebanon called the Syrian president to dispatch a delegation to Syria to discuss their maritime boundaries, but the Syrians have yet to agree to a meeting. In a region plagued by conflict and diplomatic stagnation, maritime energy negotiations seem to offer a rare degree of optimism, though no certain progress is on the immediate horizon.

D. The Moroccan-Algerian dispute over the Western Sahara

The conflict in the Western Sahara started as an insurgency by the Polisario Front against Spanish colonial forces from 1973 to 1975. After Spain withdrew, the insurgency continued against Morocco between 1975 and 1991. In 1976, the Polisario declared the establishment of the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic, which gained very limited recognition and was not admitted to the UN. A ceasefire was reached in 1991 with most of the territory of the Western Sahara under Moroccan control. Since then, despite multiple peace initiatives, no breakthroughs were achieved. Algeria strongly supports the Polisario and the right of the Sahrawi people to self-determination. This has led to continuous tensions between Morocco and Algeria, almost destroying bilateral relations and rendering regional cooperation in the Maghreb virtually non-existent.

The most recent major development occurred in December 2020, when President Trump recognised Morocco's claim to Western Sahara in exchange for normalised relations between Morocco and Israel. Unsurprisingly, the Polisario and Algeria strongly opposed the new US policy. The situation was further complicated when Spain leaned closer to the position of Morocco regarding the resolution of this conflict, a shift that was welcomed by the EU as a step toward easing unrelated tensions between Morocco and Spain. However, this created tension between Spain and Algeria, which in response suspended its friendship treaty with Spain.



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With an energy crisis and rising gas prices resulting from the war in Ukraine, gas-producing Mediterranean countries are trying to find means to export gas, especially to Europe.

Despite withdrawing its ambassador from Spain, Algeria continued to honour its gas contract with Spain. When reports surfaced that Spain decided to supply gas to Morocco, Algeria warned Spain that it would terminate its gas exports to Spain if Madrid sold any Algerian gas to other countries. Spain’s energy ministry confirmed it planned to ship gas to Morocco but stressed that none of that gas would be Algerian.

Important to note, the dispute in this conflict is not about maritime boundaries, but energy is being used by Algeria as a tool to exert pressure on different players to advance its interests including in the Western Sahara conflict.

E. Energy routes

It has not escaped the attention of Egypt and Türkiye that by becoming an integral component of an export route they acquire greater regional and international influence. Accordingly, both countries have declared their intentions to become regional energy hubs. Egypt’s efforts centre on using its liquefaction capacity and leveraging its proximity to countries with limited export capacity and no pipelines to Europe (Israel, Cyprus, and perhaps Lebanon and Palestine in the future). In the case of Türkiye, it seeks to use its pipeline infrastructure to Europe and Asia.

Currently, with an energy crisis and rising gas prices resulting from the war in Ukraine, gas-producing Mediterranean countries are trying to find means to export gas, especially to Europe:

1. As mentioned, Türkiye and Israel have discussed the construction of a 500-km sub-sea pipeline to export Israeli gas to Türkiye’s extensive pipeline network, including the \$40 billion pipeline which will carry gas from Azerbaijan to Europe and can be linked to the Israeli pipeline. Tensions between Türkiye and Israel led to the suspension of its consideration but with relations normalising, consultations resumed, and rising prices made it a cost-effective option to export Israeli gas to Europe. A major challenge, however, is that this pipeline would necessarily pass through the Cypriot EEZ and, with the continuing lack of resolution to the Cypriot question, its approval will be extremely difficult.
2. Russian President Putin recently raised with Erdoğan the possibility of diverting Russian gas from the damaged Nord Stream pipeline to Türkiye’s gas network, helping Türkiye become a regional energy hub and central actor in the European economy. This is not a completely new concept, as this pipeline was used to send significant amounts of gas to Türkiye, Hungary and other European countries, though this proposal would take the trade route to a new height. Still, the geopolitical risk of deepening ties with Russia will be important for Türkiye to consider.



3. Recent reports indicated that Türkiye may participate in a trans-Saharan gas pipeline linking Nigeria to Libya to supply gas to Europe. This project would compete with Algerian and Moroccan plans with similar objectives.
4. An EastMed gas pipeline from Israel to Greece through Cyprus and Crete to export gas to Europe was under consideration⁶. Many experts argued that it is neither economically nor technically viable. After initial support, the US indicated that it will no longer support this project, leading Erdoğan, who strongly opposed this project since it bypasses Türkiye, to say that this proves that East Mediterranean gas could only be exported through Türkiye. However, it seems that Greece is eager to continue the project and it was announced that it will be completed by 2025.
5. Egypt and Greece also discussed the possibility of constructing a pipeline from Egypt to Crete which would face fewer technical challenges than the deep-water EastMed pipeline. Moreover, Egypt and Cyprus signed an agreement in September 2018 to construct a pipeline to be completed in 2024-2025, connecting Cyprus' gas field to Egypt. Lebanon may also consider using the Arab Gas Pipeline (AGP) to export its gas to Egypt if its field has enough gas to export.
6. In addition to the land pipeline that carries 5 billion cubic metres (bcm) of gas annually from Israel to Egypt, the parties agreed in 2021 to construct an offshore pipeline to connect Israel's Leviathan gas platform to Egyptian liquefaction facilities. There is also a plan to construct another land pipeline. Israel is expected to export an additional 2.5 to 3 bcm to Egypt through the AGP through Jordan in 2022. The amount could rise to 4 bcm in the future. Israel, Egypt, and the EU signed a deal in June 2022 to boost gas exports to Europe. This builds on a \$15 billion deal agreed upon in 2018 that allows Israel to export its gas to Egypt for liquefaction and export to Europe. Israel is expected to expand production and double its gas output to about 40 bcm annually.
7. Italy signed a major contract with Algeria in November 2021 to increase gas exports to Italy. It envisages increasing gas exports from 21 bcm in 2021 to 30 bcm in 2023. Italy aims to become an energy hub with pipelines feeding gas from Libya, Algeria and Azerbaijan (through Türkiye), as well as growing LNG imports from Egypt.

⁶ Two possible routes have been considered: one with 1,200 km offshore and 500 km onshore (connecting Greece and Italy), and the other with 1,550 km offshore and 20 km onshore (connecting Greece and Bulgaria).

F. Conclusions and policy recommendations

In terms of energy politics, 2022 has been one of the most dynamic years in recent memory. Looking ahead, several points should be stressed:

1. Time is of the essence

Mediterranean conflicts are likely to witness cycles of de-escalation and re-escalation. Concerted efforts are needed to stabilise the situation whether in relation to actions on the ground or to reduce tensions resulting from inflammatory public statements and exchanges. This was evident between Greece and Türkiye, Morocco and Algeria, Egypt and Türkiye, and Israel and Hezbollah in Lebanon, to name but a few examples. One round of escalation started after the Greek prime minister urged the US not to sell F-16 fighter jets to Türkiye, prompting Erdoğan to assert that, to him, the Greek leader no longer existed.

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Mediterranean countries and their partners should take advantage of the current momentum of the Israeli-Lebanese agreement to achieve progress in their conflicts.

Although a military confrontation in the Mediterranean may not be imminent, it should not be excluded as it is evident that the situation may escalate at a very high speed. This was a risk during the Israeli-Lebanese maritime boundaries negotiations and continues to be a risk between Greece and Cyprus, on the one hand, and Türkiye, on the other. Mediterranean countries and their partners should take advantage of the current momentum of the Israeli-Lebanese agreement to achieve progress in their conflicts.

Stabilisation efforts should focus on reaching agreements and not settle for transforming high-intensity conflicts into low-intensity ones. There is an urgency to deal with the conflicts in the Mediterranean as the situation will most likely become even more volatile either because of political tensions or the prospects of new energy discoveries.

2. Great power competition in the Mediterranean arena

The Mediterranean will likely become a tense arena for great power competition. The involvement of influential oil conglomerates will likely complicate matters further. Both factors will reduce the ability of Mediterranean actors to resolve many of their conflicts amongst themselves.

Russia has always had strategic interests in the Mediterranean and while the US has been reducing its footprint in the Middle East, Russia has been expanding its air and naval bases in Syria, advanced its military presence in Libya, and announced in November 2020 that it would construct a base in the Red Sea coast in Sudan. In September, Russia reportedly dispatched a nuclear submarine to the Mediterranean to deter NATO forces, and Russian aircrafts have tried

to intimidate their US counterparts in the region. Furthermore, as a result of developments in the war in Ukraine, Russia will seek to undermine Western interests in this theatre and draw a wedge between Western countries through investment, energy and tourism in Greece, Cyprus and Türkiye, and through advancing its influence in the southern Mediterranean shores as well as in the Sahel region.

As for China, its objective at this juncture is not to replace the West in many developing countries but to gradually restructure the world order that has been dominated by the US for decades to play a larger global role. In this context, the Mediterranean constitutes the Western end of the Belt and Road Initiative and is therefore a key component of China's global strategy. There is no doubt that China has taken advantage of the declining global role of the US to advance its strategic relations at both the bilateral⁷ and multilateral levels, such as the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, the China-Arab States Cooperation Forum, and cooperation with the EU.



There are no silver bullets to resolve Mediterranean conflicts.

China's strategic interest in the Mediterranean is not limited to ports on both shores of the Mediterranean but is complemented by the construction of railroads connecting, for instance, Wuhan in China to Lyon in France, Piraeus Port in Greece, and Budapest in Hungary to reduce shipping times and costs to offset rising production costs at home and make Chinese products more competitive in Europe. China's presence in the region has created opportunities but has also raised concerns about the long-term geopolitical consequences of China's influence acquired through infrastructure projects, trade and investment.

Both sides of the Mediterranean will have to reckon with great power competition in different ways. The US will exert pressure on both sides to limit their relations with China. Most developing countries in the region resisted taking sides in the war in Ukraine and will follow the same approach regarding tensions between the US and China. It is unlikely that they will align closely with China in any significant manner especially considering the recent aggressive Chinese policies pertaining to the debts of a few developing countries. Some may also aim to play the main powers against one another to extract the maximum possible concessions and benefits.

3. The role of third parties is indispensable

There are no silver bullets to resolve Mediterranean conflicts. Most will not be resolved anytime soon and are unlikely to advance without third-party involvement. The Israeli Lebanese agreement would not have been achieved without US mediation. The German mediation between Türkiye and Greece was significant, and the UN and other international or regional organisations could also play a constructive role.

⁷ China has become the largest source of imports for Egypt, Israel and Lebanon, and the second largest for Türkiye, Syria and Jordan (Habibi, 2022).

One of the main questions at this juncture is whether it is possible to follow the approach of the Israeli Lebanese agreement to separate the energy dimension in other conflicts. This is possible and has the potential to positively impact the entire Mediterranean. It was rightly argued, for instance, that the US should mediate the maritime disputes between Türkiye and both Greece and Cyprus, not seeking to resolve all areas of contention but focusing on specific areas where both parties stand to gain from reaching an agreement.⁸ The latter is perhaps somewhat easier than the former.

4. The need for confidence-building measures (CBMs), incentives and disincentives

CBMs are needed, and so are incentives and disincentives to put pressure on parties to moderate their maximalist positions. Türkiye's exploration activities, for example, are perceived by many regional and international players as illegal. This is bound to damage its relations with its neighbours and beyond, and the resultant pressure will limit its exploration activities, challenging the country's energy security and affecting its potential as an energy hub. The EU extended the sanctions imposed on Türkiye over its unauthorised drilling activities in the Eastern Mediterranean. US sanctions were imposed because Türkiye purchased the Russian S-400 air defence system,⁹ and the possibility of additional sanctions in the Mediterranean context should not be excluded. However, incentives should also be presented, including providing a reset for EU-Türkiye relations and advancing relations with the US. Furthermore, conducting consultations to identify steps required to allow Türkiye to join the EMGF may be a useful incentive especially since members are seriously considering transforming the Forum into an energy forum. The international community has a strong set of "carrots and sticks" to be deployed to stabilise the basin and spur progress wherever possible.

5. Several platforms need to be established

Türkiye has called for an Eastern Mediterranean Conference to resolve pending issues and outstanding conflicts. This was rejected by several countries due to lack of confidence and the fact that a conference will not be a panacea. Proposals for platforms from third parties are more likely to receive support. However, they should be preceded by intensive consultations and mutual

⁸ The Administration has congressional authorisation for mediating this dispute. The Eastern Mediterranean Security and Energy Partnership Act of 2019 states that "the President is authorised to appoint a special ambassadorial level envoy who shall be responsible for representing the United States in direct negotiations with the parties to the Cyprus dispute [...] As agreed by Greece and Türkiye, the special envoy shall also represent the United States in promoting mutual discussions between those countries concerning their differences on Aegean issues" (Foreign Relations Committee, 2019a).

⁹ The Eastern Mediterranean Security and Partnership Act, which passed the Foreign Relations Committee of the US Senate in 2019, required a US committee to report on Türkiye's drilling activities in the Eastern Mediterranean. Türkiye was not mentioned by name, however, the Act provided for the reporting to the US of any hindrance to Cyprus' drilling within its EEZ and any "illegal activities" in the Eastern Mediterranean (Foreign Relations Committee, 2019b).

implementation of CBMs, including steps to de-escalate tensions. For example, Greece and Türkiye agreed in October 2020 to establish a NATO supported de-confliction mechanism, an approach that decreases the risk of accidents or incidents occurring between the two sides. In some conflicts, if conditions are not ripe for official negotiations, track 1.5 or track 2 efforts, with a strong role for third parties, can fill the mediation vacuum.

6. International law remains vital

Even though international law is open to interpretation regarding maritime border delimitations¹⁰, including in relation to the status of islands¹¹ – a major issue in Mediterranean conflicts – it should not be side-lined. Countries can be persuaded to resort to the International Court of Justice or any agreed legal procedure if a negotiated compromise cannot be reached.

7. Do no harm

External powers must ensure their policies will not inadvertently result in further escalation. For example, Ukraine still relies on Soviet-type artillery, weapons and ammunition. At one point, it was running dangerously low on these supplies and even began conserving shells in the field last summer. Eastern European countries sent Ukraine all the Soviet-type weapons they could without risking their own defences and because of the extended US weapons embargo on Cyprus, it possesses a vast stockpile of Soviet-type weaponry. In recent months, the US lifted the embargo and requested Cyprus to send weapons to Ukraine, which it is considering on the condition that transferred weapons would be adequately replaced as it wants to ensure it is prepared in case of a military confrontation with Türkiye over Northern Cyprus. The problem is that Erdoğan said that he would reinforce Türkiye's military presence on the island if the US were to start arming Cyprus, which would risk reigniting an arms race and further exacerbate tensions.

8. Address links to issues beyond energy: Climate change

Undoubtedly, there are additional challenges that exporters and transit countries must overcome. The EU's 2050 net-zero target, for example, limits the expected commercial lifetime of any new pipeline to deliver gas to Europe. After all, it is

¹⁰ According to the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), maritime boundaries should be drawn upon an agreement between the respective coastal states based on the principle of an equitable solution. This is difficult to agree on in the case of the Turkish-Greek dispute as one coastal state's island is in very close proximity to the other state's mainland. Türkiye has the longest coastline in the Eastern Mediterranean, which is an important factor in maritime border delimitation, and it argues that an equitable solution can be achieved by drawing a median line between the two countries and giving little or no effect to the islands that are very close to its mainland. However, Greece claims that islands have the right to claim EEZs just like the mainland; thus, an equitable solution entails drawing a median line between the Greek islands and the Turkish mainland (Erdoğan, 2021).

¹¹ Case law provides various precedents that give little or no effect to islands while delineating maritime boundaries between coastal states especially when a coastal state's islands are very close to another state's mainland substantially narrowing its EEZ (Erdoğan, 2021).



the energy companies that decide on gas infrastructure investments and must weigh different alternatives.

The EU and the Mediterranean countries need to advance an environmentally sustainable long-term vision that takes into account climate change, the growing demand for energy in emerging economies, and the potential transition to renewable energy. This requires a coordinated energy policy that focuses on achieving energy security and the development interests of all countries concerned. These countries must move towards a more cooperative paradigm to achieve win-win formulas that allow a balanced approach to energy routes that are efficient, balanced, and contain an acceptable division of labour through dialogue. This will not be achieved in the current environment of conflict and mistrust, and therefore progress towards conflict resolution – even in a staged manner – may be the way forward in the current chaotic international and regional environment.

The situation in the Mediterranean is complicated, tense and volatile. However, the Israel Lebanon maritime agreement created positive momentum and represents a precedent that can be replicated and built on to advance cooperation and promote peacemaking in this crucial region for international peace and security.

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