Reconsidering Turkey’s Claim For Energy Leadership – Problematic Pipe Dreams And Sustainable Energy Leadership As An Alternative

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ABSTRACT

Turkey aspires to become an energy leader by becoming an energy hub. Importantly, this implies the assumption that being an energy hub would actually result in energy leadership. Whether the energy hub-energy leadership link holds, however, has so far hardly been scrutinized. This paper intends to close this argumentative gap. It argues that Turkey has demonstrated increasing energy leadership in recent years. The virtually certain construction of the TANAP/TAP duo, however, signals important changes: the phase of becoming an energy hub is over for Turkey and the country enters a new phase of being an energy hub. This new phase promises little in terms of leadership. The paper concludes by proposing a way to reinvigorate Turkish energy leadership on a grander scale: The country should become a sustainable energy leader.

Keywords: Foreign Energy Policy, Turkish Energy Leadership, Sustainable Energy Leader

1 INTRODUCTION

The Turkish Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources aspires to make Turkey “the leader in its region in energy and natural resources” [1]. For Turkey, this means becoming an energy hub. The viability of becoming an energy hub has often been discussed [e.g. 2, 3]. In thinking about Turkish energy leadership, however, there is an even more crucial question to be answered: Does being an energy hub actually translate into regional leadership? A positive answer has often been taken for granted. The viability of such an answer, however, has rarely been scrutinized. The result is a critical gap in the analysis of Turkey’s foreign energy political strategies, since its claim for energy leadership depends on the viability of the energy hub-energy leadership link.

This paper approaches this link directly. It shows that ‘being an energy hub’ does not translate into ‘being a regional leader’. It argues that for asserting energy leadership, Turkey should adjust its energy policy and put greater emphasis on sustainable energy policies. To arrive at these insights, I first reflect on what the terms region and leadership entail. I differentiate between interdependence, power relations, and leadership. From conceptual reflection result several guiding questions, that I will thereafter discuss for three concrete cases: Turkey’s energy political past in which it was becoming an energy hub, its present and near future in which it starts being an energy hub, and finally its future and the potential of becoming a sustainable energy leader.

2 REGIONAL LEADERSHIP

Discussing regional leadership necessitates becoming clear about what the terms region and leadership might mean. By clarifying their meaning, this section develops the conceptual tools for discussing and evaluating the Turkish leadership role in energy politics. Regarding my understanding of region, I find inspiration in Buzan and Waever’s regional security complex theory. Regional security complexes, for them, “are defined by durable patterns of amity and enmity taking
the form of subglobal, geographically coherent patterns of security interdependence.” [4] Since I am interested in energy governance more than in security per se, some adjustment of this definition is needed: I understand a region as a regional energy governance complex, defined by durable, subglobal, and geographically coherent energy interdependencies and political patterns that form around them. This move from security to energy governance is not to say that energy cannot be a security issue – it might always be securitized. However, the focus on energy governance acknowledges the fact that energy might also be governed in other ways than by security means.

**Interdependence** represents the “rawest” form of relations among units in a regional energy governance complex. Interdependence can be defined as a situation in which the choices actors make are systematically interlinked. However, this state can hardly be expected to be left unmediated by political practice. Already for Buzan and Waever it is not simply regions, but *Regions and Powers*. Relations among actors in an energy governance complex, in other words, are power relations. From this perspective, a term that comes close to the idea of leadership is that of great power. However, great powers and leaders are not the same. To make this clear, Nye’s work on power and leadership is of great help. Nye defines power as “the ability to affect the behavior of others to get the outcomes you want.” [5, p. 27] He argues that doing so works in “three main ways: you can coerce them with threats, you can induce them with payments, or you can attract or co-opt them.” [5, p. 27] The former two constitute forms of hard power. The latter Nye has famously branded soft power. If both forms are combined, Nye furthermore argues, smart power emerges.

Based on this understanding, Nye approaches the question of leadership. For him, “leadership is a relationship of power“ [5, p. 25]. It is, however, not synonymous with power – neither in terms of means nor its ends. Regarding means, Nye argues, leadership cannot be built on hard power or coercion alone. It implies some degree of soft power. In a leadership relation, furthermore, there is not only the leader. Leadership emerges between leaders, followers, and context. With regard to the leader-follower relation, Nye specifies that a leader is “someone who helps a group create and achieve shared goals.” [5, p. 18] It is this need for the creation and achievement of shared goals that creates criteria for leadership going beyond those for a great power. While the latter might exist regardless of patterns of enmity and amity [4], leadership demands to transcend such patterns and to make the group of actors work towards a common goal. These goals might be attained in different ways. There are different leadership styles. Slightly departing from Nye’s scheme, I name these with reference to the major kinds of power that leaders resort to. What emerges is a triad of the rather oxymoronic hard leader, the soft leader, and the smart leader.

In sum then, a region is constituted by energy interdependencies and the political patterns that form around them. “Raw” interdependence provokes the formation of power relations, within which great powers might emerge. To become a leader, furthermore, a power needs to transcend patterns of enmity and amity, create a common purpose, and lead the actors of the region towards achieving it. For the following analysis of Turkish claims for energy leadership, this conceptual discussion suggests the following guiding questions: What kinds of interdependencies do exist? What kind of power does emerge from these? How does Turkey feature in respective power relations? What are the objectives of Turkish foreign energy politics? Are they shared by the group and do they transcend patterns of enmity and amity? If they do, which role does Turkey play to achieve these objectives? Answering these questions will allow an assessment of Turkey’s leadership role.

### 3 THE PAST: BECOMING AN ENERGY HUB

The beginning of an active Turkish role in regional energy politics goes back to the early to mid-1990s. When Azerbaijan concluded an energy deal with multinational companies in 1994, Turkey was quick to announce the “Caspian-Mediterranean Pipeline Project”, which was backed by the US [6]. In 1998, the Ankara Declaration was signed about establishing the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan or BTC oil pipeline, which became operational in 2005. The associated Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum or BTE gas pipeline started transporting gas in 2007. Particularly in the early 2000s, political focus
moved from oil to gas transport. Various pipeline proposals were made with the European-backed Nabucco project emerging as a forerunner. However, over time a “lack of vision for energy security in Europe” became apparent [7, p.4]. Nabucco was shelved in 2013, after Turkey and Azerbaijan announced plans for the Trans-Anatolian pipeline TANAP in 2011 and decided to connect it to the Trans-Adriatic Pipeline TAP rather than to a downscaled Nabucco-West project. By 2018 and 2019 respectively, the pipelines are scheduled to bring 6 billion cubic meters of gas annually (bcm/year) from the Azeri Shah Deniz field’s second phase to Turkey and 10 bcm/year to Europe [2].

For Turkey, the time until the agreement to build TANAP and TAP can be understood as a phase of becoming an energy hub. Since there were no significant pipelines in place yet, interdependencies emerged from actors’ common interest in prospective energy flows. Smart power dominated: Politics was characterized by struggles over different pipeline plans, routes, consortia, etc. that were conducted by resorting to a mix of prospective payments, to a lesser degree coercion, and attraction. Regarding the Turkish power position, particularly the hard facts became the mantra of Turkish foreign energy policy, namely its favorable geographic position [1, p. 29]. However, as Temel reminds us, attraction and thus soft power played a major role: Besides Turkey’s “ideal geographical location as a gateway to the West,” he highlights “her stability, her solid links to Europe and United States, [and] her ever deepening relations with the countries in the region” [6]. Turkey found itself in a rather strong power position. Azerbaijan wanted to sell its natural resources and found markets in Europe. It also intended to gain independence from its former rulers in Moscow. Europe and the US were eager to help the country reaching European and world markets without relying on Russian transport systems. What they all needed was Turkey’s consent.

The Turkish objectives at this time, as stated in the Energy Ministry’s strategic plan, were twofold: “the provision of the national supply security and the contribution into the supply stability in the region and the world [sic]” [1, p. 29]. The second of these did indeed constitute a common purpose for most actors of the energy governance complex (excluding Russia). Importantly, the Turkish role and thus its leadership increased over time. In the early 1990s it were international oil companies that signed the Azerbaijan-deal in 1994 and the US government that created and pushed for the common purpose of regional energy security. With the focus shifting towards gas and the Nabucco project emerging, the EU started to take over leadership from the US in the early 2000s. Turkey, on the other hand, remained a follower, its policies of that time being, as Bilgin puts it, rather awkward [8, p. 22]. Turkey started to emerge as a leader only with the shift from Nabucco to TANAP. When Turkey and Azerbaijan agreed on TANAP in June 2012, they made a significant step towards enhancing the energy security of the region.

4 THE PRESENT: BEING AN ENERGY HUB

The building of TANAP signals the beginning of an actual regional energy complex and has significant implications for Turkish leadership. Interdependencies will now be generated by actual physical infrastructure and by actual physical flows of oil and gas instead of by promises and pipeline plans. It follows a gradual shift from smart to hard power. In the process of becoming an energy hub, Turkey’s attraction as a viable and stable alternative to Russian transport systems had successfully affected the behaviour of other actors. This attraction fades with actual pipelines in place. What appeared attractive, a value added, is now expected, the new normal state of affairs. It is again Temel who expresses what replaces attraction: The hard power implied in oil and gas as “supremely political energy source[s] having the power to profoundly affect international relations” [6, p. 77]. With the virtually certain construction of the TANAP/TAP duo, the original common purpose of enhancing regional energy security has, at least partially, been achieved. With this purpose goes the original opportunity for leadership. From this point on, three energy political options for the region emerge: depoliticization, the emergence of new rivalries based on the newly established interdependencies, and the search for a new purpose.
The first of these options would remove power from the game, transforming energy interdependencies into an economic matter. It would imply the continuing integration of Turkey into European markets by, for example, joining the Energy Community and adopting the EU energy acquis. This strategy might provide significant economic benefits. However, as Erdogan has pointed out, it would deprive Turkey of the option of employing its energy position as political leverage [9].

Option two could make Turkey a (more or less) important regional power in the issue area of energy by exploiting its geostrategic position. It will, however, not result in energy leadership. After actual gas has started to flow from Azerbaijan towards Europe, wielding power means wielding power against producers, by not letting their resources pass, or against consumers, by hindering the resources to reach their destination. Wielding power, in other words, means reinvigoration patterns of enmity. As it has become apparent in the move from Nabucco to TANAP, this option seems to be the most likely future development. While TANAP has significantly contributed to the success of the EU’s ambition to establish a Southern Corridor, it is a project controlled Turkey and Azerbaijan and not by a consortium of international firms (as envisaged for Nabucco). With TANAP, the two countries have managed to significantly enhance their relative power vis-à-vis Europe compared to the role they would have had acquired in the context of Nabucco [10]. However, the confrontational language by which this shift is at times framed [9] signals that this success might come at the cost of leadership. When new patterns of enmity emerge, the community of purpose crumbles and with it any chance for real leadership.

It is therefore only the third option – this is establishing a new purpose – that promises a reinvigoration of Turkish energy leadership. It is here where the idea of Turkish sustainable energy leadership comes in, which I will discuss in the following section.

5 THE FUTURE: BECOMING A SUSTAINABLE ENERGY LEADER

Imagining Turkey as a sustainable energy leader begins with the realization that pipelines and resource flows do not exhaust the energy independencies that Turkey is entangled in. Only recently, the fifth IPCC Assessment Report has once again outlined the dire future consequences of climate change [11]. Climate change is not only immediately affecting Turkey. It is also to a great degree a result of fossil fuel combustion. Interdependencies in this case are constituted by the earth’s climate system and the combustion of fossil fuels. The quite obvious result of this is a global energy/climate complex. With these different interdependencies, the kind of powers that prevails in the complex will necessarily be different too. Capabilities in a global energy/climate complex might be said to comprise the capabilities to reduce the impact of climate change (mitigation) and to adapt to its inevitable consequences (adaptation). There is also a common purpose within this complex and it has been outlined and agreed upon with the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change as early as 1992: to avoid dangerous climate change.

So what is Turkey’s role in this? As it stands, Turkey is neither a leader nor a great power in the global energy/climate complex but more of a foot-dragger – resulting in a loss of prestige rather than leadership. Positioning itself as a sustainable energy leader among emerging economies, on the other hand, might result in significant benefits for Turkey. This becomes obvious when considering potential followers’ reactions: Industrialized countries would most likely support Turkey’s lead. Particularly the EU can be expected to embrace and (financially) support Turkey as a sustainable forerunner among emerging economies. Moreover, there is a great chance that Turkey’s leadership role would also be followed by other emerging economies such as China, India, or Brazil. As a recent study has shown, these countries are overwhelmingly sympathetic towards sustainable energy policies and the idea of energy transition [12]. What the study also shows, however, is that they conceive of these policies as fit for industrialized countries. This is where Turkey can step in, demonstrating the viability of respective policies for an emerging economy.
While followers would be more than willing to accept the Turkish leadership role, which policy shifts would be necessary to attain such a role? First of all, it is important to note that sustainable energy leadership would be based on becoming, not being a country with a strong focus on sustainable energy. Just as in the case of becoming an energy hub, what is important is the visible intention and a promising prospect of reaching such a goal in the future. Second, for demonstrating such intentions, Turkey would have to re-draft its energy policy by emphasizing credible climate action and sustainable energy policies such as the expansion of renewable energies and energy efficiency measures. Third and finally, it is important to note that striving for sustainable energy leadership does not hamper Turkey’s potential to benefit economically from its position as energy hub. Indeed, gas is an important part of any climate friendly energy solution. Sustainable energy leadership, therefore, is easily compatible with a depoliticized approach of increasing Turkey’s position in gas trade.

To conclude, although Turkey has demonstrated some energy leadership in recent years, it now has a choice to either depoliticize its gas relations or to play the power political card and reinvigorate patterns of enmity in the region. Both options will not result in Turkish energy leadership. To attain leadership, only a third option – reinventing itself as a sustainable energy leader among emerging economies – is a viable one for Turkey.

REFERENCES


