



TURKEY'S FOREIGN POLICY IN  
THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN:  
PEACEMAKING IN CYPRUS AT A CROSSROADS

**Esra Dilek**



## Introduction

Turkey's foreign policy in the Eastern Mediterranean region has been undergoing important shifts over the last few years. One important shift is related to Turkey's approach to peacemaking with regard to the Cyprus conflict.<sup>1</sup> The year 2017 marked the transition to a new period, following the failure of the international peace talks that had been ongoing since 2015. Since 2017, Turkey has expressed its preference for a two-state solution, rejecting the settlement of the conflict through unification. During the same period, hydrocarbon resource exploration in the region accelerated, leading to increasing competition and the formation of competitive alliances. Within this context, Turkey's assertive approach to defending its interests has been driven by two main frustrations: its belief that Turkish Cypriots are excluded from potential energy riches and, secondly, that other Mediterranean states are pursuing a containment policy against Turkey.<sup>2</sup>

Efforts toward a negotiated solution to the Cyprus conflict have been high on Turkey's foreign policy agenda for the last two decades. Starting with the Annan Peace Plan from 2002–2004, which was rejected in a referendum by the Greek Cypriot community in 2004, Turkey had been generally supportive of a negotiated one-state solution, i.e., the unification of the divided island. Turkey supported peace efforts in subsequent years, namely the 2008–2012 peace talks between Greek Cypriot leader Nicos Christofias and Turkish Cypriot leaders Derviş Eroğlu and later Mustafa Akıncı, the 2014 talks between Christofias and Akıncı, and the 2015–2017 international talks that were organized under the auspices of the UN in Geneva, Switzerland. The failure of the 2015–2017 Geneva talks in summer 2017, however, signaled the transition to an increasingly assertive approach for Turkey. Since 2017, Turkey has rejected the idea of negotiating for a bizonal, bicommunal federation on the grounds that failed negotiations have shown that such a solution is not possible. Accordingly, Turkey has repeatedly pointed to a two-state solution as the only possible way forward. Considering that Greece and the Republic of Cyprus (RoC) are adamantly against such a prospect and that likewise the UN is unsupportive of the separation of the island into two sovereign states, Turkey's stance practically means that a negotiated settlement is not on the agenda. In line with this

change of foreign policy direction, the Justice and Development Party (AKP) government in Turkey has taken several assertive steps, the most prominent being the partial opening of the abandoned city of Varosha (Maraş) in July 2021.

Over the past decade, the Eastern Mediterranean region has become an area of tension in relation to hydrocarbon resource search activities, which have accelerated since the mid-2010s. The discovery of large natural fields within the exclusive economic zones (EEZs) of Israel, the RoC, and Egypt have revealed that these resources have the potential to fulfill European countries' energy security needs, which have become especially prominent since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. However, the overlapping EEZ claims of Turkey, Greece, the RoC, Egypt, and Libya have increased tensions with regard to sovereignty claims and sea borders. During this period, the link between resource exploration and the Cyprus conflict has become increasingly prevalent. As subsequent developments have revealed, the acceleration of hydrocarbon research activities and related EEZ disputes have contributed to the *regionalization* of the Cyprus conflict, meaning that the conflict has been integrated into countries' regional agendas, their competition for resources, and competitive alliance-building. The two issues have since become integrated into Turkey's foreign policy strategy for the region.

This analysis focuses on developments in the Eastern Mediterranean since 2017 with a view to the transformation of Turkey's approach toward peacemaking. Turkey has been going through an important political transformation over the last decade. Since the early 2010s, Turkey has been regarded as having transitioned to a competitive authoritarian system and frequently appears in discussions on the global rise of illiberalism.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, this analysis focuses on regional dynamics. It begins by identifying critical junctures in peacemaking efforts to solve the Cyprus conflict and assesses the 2015–2017 talks as a critical turning point. The analysis then moves on to outline the developments in hydrocarbon exploration activities with a focus on how these developments affected Turkey's peacemaking approach in the region. The final section discusses prospects for 2023 and possible pathways for addressing tensions, including the EU's role in this process.

## Critical Junctures in Peacemaking Efforts to Solve the Cyprus Conflict

The history of peace efforts in Cyprus over the last two decades has been marked by various public and back-channel initiatives. The most well-known of these is the Annan Peace Plan of 2002–2004, which provisioned the unification of the island. As the most comprehensive peace plan for the conflict to date, the plan was rejected in a referendum in May 2004 by a majority of Greek Cypriots, while it was accepted by the majority of Turkish Cypriots in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC). Following the rejection of the plan, the Republic of Cyprus was accepted as a full member of the EU in May 2004. Greek Cypriots' rejection of the Annan Plan and their subsequent membership in the EU constitute central points of reference in Turkish governments' political discourse when expressing disenchantment with the non-resolved status of the conflict throughout the years. Turkey has argued that the EU has not fulfilled its promise of supporting a solution to Northern Cyprus's non-recognized status, which has effectively led to the isolation of its inhabitants for decades. Turkey has also sustained the argument that the acceptance of the Annan Plan by Turkish Cypriots has been a clear indicator of the north's willingness to solve the conflict as opposed to the south's foot-dragging for extending the status quo.

After a period of impasse following the failure of the Annan process, in September 2008, negotiations were launched between Greek Cypriot leader Demetris Christofias and Turkish Cypriot leader Mehmet Ali Talat. The talks were initiated after the election of Christofias as President of the RoC in February 2008, defeating former president Tassos Papadopoulos, who had campaigned for the “no” vote for the Annan Plan referendum. The talks were preceded by the establishment of technical committees and working groups for negotiations in April 2008 and the opening of Ledra Street, a major shopping street running between northern and southern Nicosia, as a confidence-building measure. The election of Derviş Eroğlu as President of Northern Cyprus in April 2010 led to an impasse in the talks, and meetings continued in 2010 and 2011 with no significant results. The talks eventually

stalled in April 2012 with UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon announcing that there was no common ground for continuing the talks between the leaders of the two communities. Throughout this period Turkey generally presented a supportive stance for the talks despite periods of criticism. In the meantime, resource exploration activities in the RoC's EEZ provoked Turkey's reaction on the basis that Turkish Cypriots' rights were disregarded. Following this, Turkey signed an EEZ delimitation agreement with the TRNC partially overlapping with the RoC's claimed EEZ and granted an exploration license to the Turkish National Oil and Gas Company (TPAO).

A new process started in 2014. In February 2014, the leaders of northern and southern Cyprus, Derviş Eroğlu and Nicos Anastasiades, shared a joint declaration with the public whereby the parties agreed on seven points.<sup>4</sup> Through the declaration, the leaders expressed their determination to resume structured negotiations based on the principle that “nothing is agreed until everything is agreed.” The third point of the declaration foresaw that the settlement of the Cyprus dispute would be based on a bicomunal, bizonal federation with equal citizenship for all Cypriots and that a united Cyprus shall be a single international legal entity under a single sovereign. The federation would be voted on in separate referenda with the approval of both communities. However, the talks stalled in October 2014 as a result of developments related to hydrocarbon exploration activities. As a response to the RoC's granting of hydrocarbon exploration licenses in areas claimed by Turkey and the TRNC, Turkey published a press release in October 2014 criticizing hydrocarbon exploration activities by the RoC,<sup>5</sup> issued a NAVTEX (Navigational Telex) for conducting seismic survey activities in areas designated by the Republic of Cyprus as its own EEZ, and dispatched exploration vessels in the area, leading to a political crisis and the withdrawal of the RoC from the ongoing talks.<sup>6</sup>

The election of Mustafa Akıncı, a left-wing and pro-resolution politician in Northern Cyprus defeating Derviş Eroğlu in the April 2015 elections, raised hopes for the start of a new process. Initiated after a seven-month break in May 2015 in Mont Pelerin, Switzerland, the 2015–2017 peace talks were the

most promising ones in the recent political history of the island.<sup>7</sup> The talks resumed with confidence-building measures whereby the Turkish side decided that Greek Cypriots do not need to fill in visa forms at border crossings. After negotiations briefly stalled in late 2016 as a result of disagreements related to territorial adjustments, the talks resumed in January 2017 in Crans Montana, Switzerland. With the resumption of talks, Turkey pointed to the 2017 talks as being a “final chance” for a solution, meaning that the talks were regarded as a breaking point. Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu stated, “there will either be a solution or not—it is meaningless to continue the situation the way it is.”<sup>8</sup> The Crans Montana talks stalled, again, in February 2017 over disagreements on security guarantees. The talks resumed in June 2017 after the Greek side’s decision to step back from setting security guarantees as a prerequisite for the negotiations. Eventually, however, the talks failed in July 2017 upon disagreements on the status of Turkish troops on the island and security guarantees for Turkish Cypriots.<sup>9</sup>

Following the failure of the Crans Montana talks, Turkey started openly voicing the view that a one-state solution to the conflict is not possible and that there is a need for more “creative pathways” for settlement. Turkey openly expressed its preference for a two-state solution, effectively meaning the recognition of Northern Cyprus as a separate state. This practically meant that Turkey did not support the internationally brokered negotiations guided by the UN. Since 2017, Turkey has been repeatedly criticizing the regular six-month extension of the UN mission in Cyprus.<sup>10</sup> More recently, in 2021 another unsuccessful attempt at starting a new peace process began. The informal 5+UN meetings were conducted in April 2021 under the auspices of the UN as an attempt by UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres to solve the conflict. However, no common ground was found for the resumption of the negotiations.<sup>11</sup> The two sides lacked the consensus needed to resume talks as the Greek Cypriot side supported the idea of a united federal system while the Turkish Cypriot side supported a two-state deal.

## Competition Over Energy Resources: Additional Complexities Since 2017

Hydrocarbon activities in the Eastern Mediterranean date back to the early 2000s. However, it was not until 2009 that a breakthrough in exploration activity occurred after the discovery of Israel’s Tamar field in 2009 and the Leviathan field in 2010. Subsequent large discoveries include the Cypriot Aphrodite field discovered in 2011 and Egypt’s Zohr field (the largest to date) discovered in 2015. More recently, the RoC discovered the Calypso and Glaucus-1 fields in 2018 and 2019, respectively. Exploration activities and the discovery of resources have typically paralleled the signing of bilateral agreements. The Republic of Cyprus signed agreements with Egypt in 2003, Lebanon in 2007, and Israel in 2010. In response, Turkey signed a delimitation agreement with the TRNC in 2011. More recently, Turkey signed two agreements with Libya in 2019 and a third agreement in 2022. In response to the 2019 Turkish-Libyan agreements, Greece signed an agreement with Egypt in 2020. As a result of competing agreements, Turkey, Greece, and the RoC have been entangled in overlapping claims over sovereignty and sea borders. In general terms, Turkey categorically rejects the RoC’s drilling activities until a final settlement is reached regarding the Cyprus conflict. Turkey maintains that the TRNC holds collective and indivisible ownership of these resources, pointing to Turkish Cypriots’ rights to receive their share of the riches around the island.

Drilling activities in the region accelerated after 2017. In April 2017, the RoC signed agreements with international hydrocarbon research companies and started drilling activities in block 6 in December. In February 2018, Turkey blocked drilling activities by the Italian energy corporation ENI on block 3 of the RoC’s EEZ on the grounds that it violated the sovereign rights of Turkish Cypriots.<sup>12</sup> Despite the tense environment, as a positive development in November 2018, two new border crossings opened between north and south Cyprus, the first in eight years.<sup>13</sup> However, this positive step remained in the shadows of geopolitical tensions. In December 2018, Greece, the Republic of Cyprus, Israel, and Italy signed a protocol to start the construction of the EastMed pipeline, planned to transport gas from Israel to Europe through the RoC, Greece, and

Italy. The project excludes Turkey despite the fact that the project's feasibility will remain low due to increased construction costs unless Turkey is part of the project. The EU has expressed support for the EastMed Pipeline, seeing it as a project supporting Europe's energy security vis-à-vis Russian aggression. The EastMed Pipeline project was included in the European Commission's list of Projects of Common Interest (PCIs) in November 2021.<sup>14</sup> Projects of Common Interest are expected to be in line with the general principles of the EU's energy policy. Such principles include the diversification of Europe's sources of energy, ensuring energy security, and the move to a low-carbon economy in line with the Paris Agreement.<sup>15</sup>

Turkey has also been excluded from regional cooperation initiatives that have accelerated over the last years. The EastMed Gas Forum, informally active since January 2019, was formally established in September 2020 as a regional cooperation initiative excluding Turkey. The Forum is composed of Greece, Cyprus, Egypt, Jordan, Palestine, Israel, France, and Italy and aims to enhance cooperation in the area of energy exploration and consumption among its members. A second initiative, the Philia (Friendship) Forum was convened in Athens on February 11, 2021 with the participation of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Greece, the RoC, Egypt, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and France. Turkey has been excluded from both cooperation initiatives. The timing of the Philia Forum, following exploratory meetings in January 2021 to address differences between Greece and Turkey, signaled Greece's preference for stepping up its containment policy toward Turkey rather than adopting a more cooperative approach.

Turkey's exclusion from emerging regional cooperation has strained relations between Turkey and Greece, the RoC, and other regional countries. Adding to the existing tensions, the Turkish government presented the Blue Homeland (*Mavi Vatan*) doctrine in 2019 as an irredentist doctrine of national defence. The Blue Homeland map was illustrated after a naval exercise in 2019,<sup>16</sup> depicting maritime boundaries surrounding 462,000 km<sup>2</sup> of Mediterranean waters around Turkey and excluding the EEZs of Cyprus and Greek islands in the Aegean as well as Castellorizo. In 2019, Turkey initiated exploration activities in areas defined by the RoC as belonging

to its own EEZ in response to unilateral exploration activities conducted by the RoC and regional cooperation between the RoC, Greece, Israel, and Egypt. On the other hand, Turkey has supported a proposal shared in July 2019 by Turkish Cypriot leader Mustafa Akıncı for the establishment of a joint energy committee with the participation of the RoC in hydrocarbon exploration.<sup>17</sup> The proposal was rejected by the Greek Cypriot side on the grounds that it "detracts from the substance of Cyprus's political problem."<sup>18</sup> In November 2019, Turkey signed two memoranda with Libya, demarcating exclusive economic zones between the two countries and foreseeing military cooperation. Following Turkey's drilling activities, in October 2019 the European Council presented its resolutions deciding to sanction Turkey for unauthorized activities in the RoC's EEZ and expressing solidarity with the RoC as its member state.<sup>19</sup> More recently, Turkey signed a third memorandum on hydrocarbon exploration with Libya's Government of National Unity in October 2022.<sup>20</sup>

Tensions in the region heightened in August 2020 after a minor collision took place between a Turkish warship escorting the survey vessel *Oruç Reis* and a Greek frigate. The collision led to the most severe crisis between Greece and Turkey since 1996, when a military crisis erupted between the two countries over the sovereignty of the Imia/Kardak islets in the Aegean. The tension was only under control after Germany interceded. Turkey and Greece decided to resume exploratory meetings that started in 2002 (and later stalled in 2016 after the failed coup attempt in Turkey) to address the disagreements over the Aegean. The 6<sup>th</sup> round of the meetings took place on January 25, 2021 in Istanbul. The latest round took place on in February 2022 in Athens. Since then, the meetings seem to have ceased, since no information has been shared by the MFAs of the two countries.

During his visit to Northern Cyprus in July 2021, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan criticized the EU for not keeping its promises to support Turkish Cypriots and stated that Turkey is unwilling to support negotiation models that were proven to fail during previous years.<sup>21</sup> In his speech, Erdoğan further announced the opening of Varosha, a buffer zone city that had been closed since May 1984 after the UN Resolution 550 forbade any settlements in the city by people other than its inhabitants.<sup>22</sup> While

discussions about the opening of Varosha date back at least to 2012, whereby the then president of Northern Cyprus Derviş Eroğlu presented a proposal for the return of the city's inhabitants under the control of the TRNC,<sup>23</sup> the most recent plans for the opening of the city became public in October 2020. Eventually, a 1.5-km<sup>2</sup> area that does not cross into the private property of inhabitants was opened in 2021.<sup>24</sup> Erdoğan pointed to the recognition of Turkish Cypriots' sovereign equality and underlined that a two-state solution is "not only the desired outcome but a necessity."<sup>25</sup> Following his visit, in an interview in July 2021, Turkish President Erdoğan stated that "there is no North and South Cyprus for us anymore. There are two independent countries only."<sup>26</sup> The two-state solution is now projected as the only way forward for the Cyprus issue.

In July 2022, TRNC President Ersin Tatar proposed a four-plus-two-point cooperation proposal through a letter to the UN.<sup>27</sup> The proposal included the following key points: cooperation on hydrocarbon exploration, electricity, use of solar energy, freshwater, irregular migration, and demining. In May 2022, Italy's ENI and France's TotalEnergies began drilling and exploration activities off the southwest coast of Cyprus.<sup>28</sup> In response, Turkey resumed gas exploration activities in August in the Eastern Mediterranean in non-contested areas at Yorukler-1, well off the coast of Mersin.<sup>29</sup> A fourth drilling vessel, *Abdulhamid Han*, was presented to the public as Turkey's largest and highest capacity exploration vessel. In September 2022, the United States announced that it would lift an arms embargo on the RoC, and the RoC joined the U.S. National Guard Bureau's State Partnership Program.<sup>30</sup> These moves indicated U.S. support for Greek Cyprus and soured relations between Turkey and the United States.

However, despite its implicit support of the RoC more recently, the United States withdrew its support of the EastMed project in January 2022 in a non-paper, pointing to doubts about the economic viability of the project as well as environmental concerns regarding green energy targets, a decision that was received positively by Turkey.<sup>31</sup> The "economic viability" argument fits well within Turkey's approach to the issue, since Turkey is well-aware of the fact that the project will be excessively costly if it does not cross Turkish territory. Excluding Turkey, the estimated cost of the EastMed pipeline project

is USD 6–7 billion, which is considered too high. Further, the project also does not fit within the Europe Union's Green Deal, according to which the EU aims to cut carbon emissions in half until 2030 and fully transition to green energy by 2050. Despite its setbacks, the EU's designation of the EastMed as a project of common interest reveals the prioritization of energy security amid concerns regarding Russian aggression. The United States' recent defense partnership agreement with the RoC points to similar concerns regarding regional security.

### Conclusion: Prospects for 2023 and Beyond

Turkey's foreign policy regarding the Cyprus conflict entered a new phase in 2017. This was related to two interconnected developments: the failure of peace efforts that had been ongoing in both public and back-channels since the early 2000s and, second, increasing geopolitical competition over hydrocarbon resources in the Eastern Mediterranean region. Peace efforts since the 2000s have all resulted in stalemate, leaving the parties to the conflict with no tangible positive outcomes. After the failure of the international Crans Montana talks in 2017, Turkey openly voiced its preference for a two-state settlement of the conflict, effectively pointing to partition as the only way forward. Turkey legitimized this approach by arguing that all attempts at a bicomunal solution have failed and that there is a need for a new approach to overcome the impasse. During the same period, the acceleration of hydrocarbon research activities contributed to the regionalization of the conflict, meaning that the conflict was integrated into the regional competition for resources and alliance-building. Considering the already existing complexity around Cyprus, this regionalization does not help moderate the stances of the parties.

As Turkey has entered an election year in 2023, whereby general and presidential elections are scheduled to take place before June 2023, the prospects for stability in the Eastern Mediterranean seem bleak. The 2023 elections might become a turning point for Turkey in case of the AKP's electoral loss as this would mean a change in government for the first time in more than two decades. A potential change in government would likely signal the transformation

of Turkey's foreign policy as opposition parties are more likely to adopt a less assertive discourse in relation to Turkey's regional positioning. Along with Turkey, Greece and the RoC are also in an election year. The RoC held presidential elections in February 2023. The election of Nikos Christodoulides as president points to an uncertain direction for peace efforts on the island as Christodoulides has reiterated the RoC's main positions, pointing to a bizonal, bicomunal state with the prerequisite that zero foreign troops and foreign guarantors are on the island.<sup>32</sup> Greece is expected to hold general elections in May 2023. While polls reveal that the incumbent New Democracy Party is expected to retain its position and therefore a major change in government is not expected, coalition-building processes will be important. Both elections will have a great impact on relations in the region.

Although the outcome is hard to predict, Turkey's 2023 elections will no doubt be transformative for both its domestic and regional politics. Adding to the election haze, the southern part of the country was hit by a deadly earthquake in February 2023, claiming the lives of tens of thousands. The death toll and the management of the disaster is expected to be definitive with regard to the electoral support that the AKP government will receive. The earthquake also impacted Turkey's relations with its neighbors. Support from countries in the region, including Greece and Israel, among others, seems to have had a positive effect on the relations with these countries. Cooperative messages shared between Turkish MFA Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu and Greek PM Nikos Dendias point to a positive turn in relations.<sup>33</sup> However, Turkey's rejection of the RoC's offer to send a rescue team to assist with earthquake rescue activities reveals that direct cooperation is still not on the agenda.<sup>34</sup>

In December 2022, Turkey dispatched *Abdulhamid Han* off the coast of Mersin in its southeastern Mediterranean coast, where it conducts exploration activities in non-contested waters. In January 2023, Greece started hydrocarbon explorations off the coast of Crete with the cooperation of Exxon-Mobil. The Greek Minister of the Environment and Energy Kostas Skrekas claimed that the resources off Crete are expected to be double the size of Aphrodite field off Cyprus, close to the size of the Israeli Tamar field, pointing to the importance of this

discovery.<sup>35</sup> As a positive development toward solving the sovereignty disputes in the region, Israel and Lebanon signed an EEZ delimitation deal in October 2022 settling a long-term EEZ dispute. The dispute dates back to 1948 but became more prominent after 2010, after the discovery of sizeable hydrocarbon resources in the Qana and Karish gas fields in the disputed area. The deal was signed after a two-year negotiation period and was brokered by the United States.

In future, the EU should function as a catalyst in the process of detangling the EEZ and Cyprus conflicts and thus reverse the trend toward the regionalization of the Cyprus conflict. The most important way forward is to consider alternative routes for pipelines and transportation techniques. Indeed, discussions about alternative routes have already resurfaced. For example, news in April 2021 pointed to discussions between Greece and Egypt about changing the route of the EastMed pipeline in order to tackle the technical difficulties of the project.<sup>36</sup> According to this plan, the gas pipeline would still start from Israel's Leviathan gas field but instead of reaching Cyprus through an offshore pipeline, it would transit Egypt by land and then cross to the Greek island of Crete. More recently, in March 2022, discussions about a gas pipeline to be constructed between Israel and Turkey made it to the news.<sup>37</sup> Such a pipeline will also provide an alternative to the much-contested EastMed pipeline project. At the same time, Turkey has been continuing exploration and drilling activities in the Black Sea, where EEZs are clearly demarcated among littoral countries. The Black Sea route has the potential of balancing tensions, as new discoveries by Turkey can function as an alternative to fulfill its energy demands in the effort to find alternatives to Russian gas. Considering Turkey's wish to become an energy hub and a central actor in the region, such developments would align with Turkey's interests and encourage cooperation in the area of energy security. Overall, alternative routes would contribute to the de-regionalization of the conflict by de-tangling the competition for resource exploration and drilling around Cyprus as well as the return to a negotiation-based framework for solving the conflict. Confidence-building measures, namely ceasing licensing and drilling activities in disputed areas, would support this process.

## Annex:

### List of events in Cyprus and the Eastern Mediterranean 2017–2022

#### 2017

- **January 12, 2017:** Greek and Turkish Cypriot leaders provided their maps to the UN as part of the Cyprus conference in Crans Montana
- **February 2017:** Talks in Crans Montana stalled
- **February 2017:** Noble Energy approved Leviathan Phase I Plan
- **April 5/6, 2017:** RoC signs agreements with international hydrocarbon search companies
- **June 2017:** Cyprus Conference in Crans Montana restarted after a five-month break
- **July 2017:** Talks stalled, again
- **December 29, 2017:** RoC starts drilling activities in block 6; Turkey's statement on why the talks failed; RoC accuses Turkey of acting in a "pre-modern" manner

#### 2018

- **February 2018:** Discovery of RoC Calypso gas field by ENI (in block 6)
- **February 10, 2018:** Turkey's naval forces blocked ENI drillship, forcing it to leave
- **February 23, 2018:** Cyprus accuses Turkey of blocking drilling ship and threatens to use force
- **June 1, 2018:** Turkey sends out first drilling vessel *Fatih* to the Eastern Mediterranean
- **December 20, 2018:** Fifth trilateral summit between Israel, Greece, and Cyprus

#### 2019

- **January 2019:** East Med Gas Forum founded
- **February 2019:** Glaukus-1 field discovered near Cyprus by ExxonMobil
- **May 7, 2019:** Italy opposes Poseidon gas pipeline landfall
- **May 2019:** Turkey sends first drill ship *Fatih*
- **July 13, 2019:** Proposal by TRNC leader M. Akinci for the establishment of a joint energy committee for hydrocarbon exploration (rejected by the Greek side, supported by Turkey)
- **July 2019:** EU condemns Turkey for unauthorized drilling activities
- **October 14, 2019:** European Council Resolutions decide on sanctions for Turkey for unauthorized drilling activities
- **October 17/18, 2019:** EU reaffirms its solidarity with the RoC regarding respect for sovereignty and sovereign rights
- **November 29, 2019:** Turkey signs maritime deal with Libya

## 2020

- **January 3, 2020:** Israel-Cyprus-Greece sign USD 5.8-billion gas pipeline deal
- **January 8, 2020:** Meeting between Greece, RoC, France, and Egypt in Cairo
- **January 2020:** Turkey sends exploration vessels close to the new maritime border with Libya
- **February 27, 2020:** The EU implements sanctions on Turkey, including the names of two TPAO officers
- **May 15, 2020:** The European Council calls on Turkey to respect the “sovereignty of all EU member states over their territorial sea as well as all their sovereign rights in their maritime borders”
- **July 21, 2020:** Turkey issues first NAVTEX alert for *Oruc Reis* seismic vessel’s exploration activities
- **July 28, 2020:** After Germany’s diplomatic efforts Turkey announces that it is suspending hydrocarbon exploration activities
- **October 19, 2020:** Right-wing nationalist Ersin Tatar is elected as president of TRNC
- **October 8, 2020:** Announcement of plan for opening the abandoned city of Varosha (Maraş) and partial opening
- **December 2020:** Turkey halts offshore gas exploration

## 2021

- **April 2021:** 5+BM informal Cyprus meeting
- **April 20, 2021:** No common ground found to restart negotiations on Cyprus
- **July 2021:** TRNC opens a 1.5-km<sup>2</sup> area of Varosha to the public with access to the sea. Entrance to this area is made through checkpoints and ID checks

## 2022

- **January 11, 2022:** U.S. withdraws support for the East Med pipeline
- **May 23, 2022:** Italy’s ENI and TotalEnergies of France begin drilling and exploration activities off the southwest coast of Cyprus
- **July 1, 2022:** Ersin Tatar proposes four-point cooperation proposal for solving the Cyprus issue through a letter submitted to the UN
- **August 9, 2022:** Turkey dispatches a fourth ship to explore for oil off the coast of Cyprus, resuming gas exploration
- **August 22, 2022:** Eni announces the discovery of the Cronos-1 field off Cyprus
- **September 16, 2022:** U.S. announces that it will lift an arms embargo on the RoC
- **September 2022:** TRNC submits a Status of Forces Agreement Proposal to the UN requesting the UNFICYP enter into a formal agreement with the Turkish Cypriots in order to continue its operations in Northern Cyprus
- **October 3, 2022:** Turkey and Libya sign hydrocarbon deal for exploration activities in Libya’s territorial waters
- **October 10, 2022:** RoC joins the National Defense Bureau of the U.S. Department of Defense
- **November 8, 2022:** The EU prolongs the sanctions regime in response to Turkey’s unauthorized drilling activities
- **November 22, 2022:** Greece signs memorandum of understanding deal with Egypt that undercuts the Turkey-Libya deal
- **December 23, 2022:** Turkey accuses Cyprus of increasing tensions in East Med over gas exploration

## Notes

- 1 | For a general overview of Turkey's current foreign policy activism, see Sinem Adar et al., "Visualizing Turkey's Foreign Policy Activism," Center for Applied Turkey Studies (CATS), August 20, 2021, accessed February 10, 2023, <https://www.cats-network.eu/topics/visualizing-turkeys-foreign-policy-activism>.
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**Esra Dilek** is a 2022/23 Mercator-IPC Fellow.

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### **Istanbul Policy Center**

Bankalar Caddesi Minerva Han No: 2 Kat: 4  
34420 Karaköy-İstanbul  
T +90 212 292 49 39  
ipc@sabanciuniv.edu - ipc.sabanciuniv.edu

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