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Turkey Looks to Black Sea for Energy Self-Sufficiency

Turkey is placing great store in its Black Sea hydrocarbon potential. A session of the 9th Turkish International Oil and Gas Conference, held in Ankara on 16-17 March, assessed potential resources there and outlined the work that lies ahead. Session chairman Volkan S Ediger of Izmir University reminded delegates: “The Black Sea is a dream for all of us. We all have expectations, but we must have realistic expectations.” For a number of companies involved in Black Sea exploration, prospects look good.

Yurdal Oztas, Vice-President of Turkish Petroleum Corporation (TPAO) told MEES that based on the information gathered by seismic surveys, Turkey’s offshore Black Sea could hold recoverable reserves of 10bn barrels of crude oil and 2 trillion cu ms of natural gas – more than the current estimated reserves of Azerbaijan. Such a prospect could transform Turkey from an energy-poor country dependent upon oil and gas imports – Turkey currently produces roughly 73,000 b/d of oil equivalent – into the regional energy hub it aspires to be. “Turkey’s potential is not yet clearly defined,” he said. “Turkey needs persistent exploration of the Black Sea – and the Mediterranean.”

ExxonMobil and Brazil’s Petrobras are involved in partnerships with TPAO to explore and develop Turkey’s deepwater Black Sea resources, but Mr Oztas said that getting foreign companies to invest in the region was not a problem. “What we need is know-how and technology,” he told MEES. “Now the technology has finally become available. We have been waiting a long time to develop the Black Sea.” He said that wells in the offshore waters would need to be set in 2,000 ms of water and to be drilled some 3,000 ms beneath the seabed. First oil from the Black Sea could arrive in as little as five years, he added.

ExxonMobil Vice-President of New Business Opportunities Elwyn C Griffiths noted that just a few years ago, drilling in the Black Sea was considered “unthinkable.” The company has conducted a considerable amount of field work and gathered seismic data in 2009 and will continue during 2010. ExxonMobil is using remote reservoir resistivity mapping (R3M) technology to identify drilling targets, but it has yet to choose well locations, he said. Meanwhile, he added, the Transocean Deepwater Champion drill-ship is currently under construction in South Korea, for deployment by ExxonMobil in the deepwater Black Sea.

During 2002-09, Turkey invested \$4.8bn in exploration and development and plans to invest a further \$3.8bn during 2010-2012. Since oil exploration began in Turkey in the 1930s, some 1,400 exploration wells have been drilled, while total wells drilled number 3,700. A number of key Turkish speakers emphasized the need for more exploration activity throughout the country, especially onshore. There are 42 oil companies operating in Turkey, of which 24 are Turkish. Some 415 exploration licenses have been issued, covering 382,000 sq km.

Most drilling in Turkey has been carried out by TPAO, and the company is keen to step up activities. Omer Sahinturk, Manager of TPAO’s Exploration Department, told the conference “we have an onshore target of 500 wells in five years.” Turkey’s drilling has been concentrated in the southeast corner of the country, where nearly all of its oil is produced, and in Thrace, where natural gas now accounts for a significant volume of Turkey’s hydrocarbon output. Apart from the Black Sea potential, Mr Sahinturk also said offshore prospects looked good in the Antalya, Mersin and Iskenderun plays of the Turkish Mediterranean.

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