
REPORT

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“CYPRUS PIGEON” IN THE MIDDLE OF “WHITE SHARKS” AND “ISLAMIC HAWKS”

INTRODUCTION

Oil and gas constitute sources of energy and, by extension, power. However, the question is whether oil and gas constitute raw materials, utilized only for prosperity, development and stability or they may turn into a source of friction and thereby become fuel for conflict.

There is already reliable and concrete evidence, stemming from relevant research, showing that the Southeastern Mediterranean Sea lies on huge reserves of gas and probably oil. Israel and Cyprus undertook their own surveys within their respective Exclusive Economic Zones (Reuters 2011, Daljecom 2009)¹. The first phase of these explorations was successfully accomplished. Both countries announced their intention to exploit their natural resources, especially in the neighboring “block 12”, “Leviathan” and “Tamar”² (Noble Energy 2011, LNG World News 2011, Barkat 2010, Shemer 2011, Cooper 2010, Oil in Israel 2009)³. In this respect, a new geopolitical environment seems to have come into being. Currently, the relevant question is whether there is fertile ground for the shaping of a new geopolitical map through the establishment of a coalition between Israel and Cyprus, including, probably, other states.

¹ On December 17, 2010 the Republic of Cyprus and Israel signed an agreement and delineated their Exclusive Economic Zones (Cyprus Foreign Ministry, 2010)

² In accordance to the ERPIC website: “The discovery in the East Mediterranean of a giant natural gas field – the largest discovered in the last 10 years – promises to bring an entirely new dynamic to the Levant. Houston-based Noble Energy announced on December 29 that it had discovered a reservoir of natural gas amounting to an estimated 16 trillion cubic feet (450 billion cubic meters) in the Leviathan structure in Israel’s offshore exclusive economic zone (EEZ). Following the discovery by Noble in 2009 of the Tamar gas field, where reserves are estimated at 8.4 tcf (238 bcm) and the Dalit gas field, with reserves of 0.5 tcf, Israel’s offshore natural gas reserves are now estimated at around 25 tcf (705 bcm).

The discoveries have shaken things up in the East Mediterranean. They have created a new wave of anticipation in Cyprus, where Noble holds a 100% interest in the offshore Block 12, which lies adjacent to the Israeli EEZ and less than 60 kilometers from Leviathan. In Lebanon, where politicians wasted little time in declaring that the discoveries that Noble was making were actually reserves that belonged to Lebanon, the parliament hurriedly rushed through the passage of a hydrocarbon law so that it could proceed with inviting foreign firms to engage in offshore exploration too” (ERPIC 2011).

³ For this reason the Cypriot Minister of Foreign Affairs Dr Erato Aozakou Marcoullis on September 23, 2011 visited Israel where she had meetings and negotiations with Israelis Officials. Dr Marcoullis had talks with the Prime Minister of Israel, Mr. Benjamin Netanyahu, the President of the country, Mr. Shimon Peres and her Israeli counterpart, Mr. Avigdor Liberman (Cyprus Foreign Ministry, 2011).

South Eastern Mediterranean Sea and the Middle East constitute sensitive geostrategic and geo-economic areas where conflicting and converging national interests are met. Israel is not the only regional power. Turkey has always intended to play a leading regional role. Therefore, a new geopolitical evolution should be seen through the lens of the Turkish foreign policy and national interests. Such a foreign policy is in line with the Turkish strategic goal, which predicts the consolidation of Ankara's dominant presence in a regional level.

This article will examine:

1. The regional geopolitical and geostrategic environment.
2. Whether concrete coalitions are likely to be established as a result of the hydrocarbon deposits, which lie in the Exclusive Economic Zone of Cyprus and Israel.
3. What is the Turkish reaction after Cyprus and Israel's decision to explore and exploit their gas recourses? A relevant question is whether Cyprus and Israel will establish a geo-economic and strategic coalition.
4. Whether it would be possible to establish a coalition between Cyprus and Israel, including other countries.
5. What is the preventive role that the EU as such, its leading states, the US and Russia, can play if tension and crises arise.
6. In what extent the Turkish accession to the EU might be affected if a military crisis erupts?

THE GEOSTRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT

Cyprus is located in a pivotal geopolitical and geostrategic region where the rules of balance of power and strategic methods and practices of the Cold War never ended! Cyprus lies between two powerful states, namely Turkey and Israel. Both, Turkey and Israel were allies under the supervision of the US and they still hold a key - dominant role in the regional system. However, when the moderate Islamic Party of the AKP came into office, Turkey attempted to formulate a twofold policy: The first direction focused on the EU (Council of the EU 2004, Council of Europe 2005) and the second on the Islamic and Arab World (Rehn 2007). The central Turkish aim is to become an indisputable regional power. A relevant question is whether such a Turkish policy can coexist or not with the Israelis national and strategic goal.

There is no doubt that Israel constitutes a regional power which has been consolidated through victorious wars against Arab countries and military strength. In the current period, Israel maintains its strategic supremacy within the regional system, while realizing that the Turkish political and strategic ambitions put at risk its national interests and that the Turkish "zero problems policy" (Davutoğlu, 2010, Svet, 2011) cannot lead to comprehensive solutions. Since Turkey acts as a regional power, the solutions it seeks, in order to solve the various problems it faces with its neighboring countries, would serve Turkish national interests and strategic goals. Israel detects that Turkish policy encompasses two main threats:

Firstly, Turkey has put forward a strategy with the aim of rising itself as a regional power with the prospect to replace the dominant role Israel plays in the regional system (Friedmam 2007, Ottens 2010, Joff, 2010). Ankara questions the Israeli legal national interests and especially the deposits of gas and oil which lie in the sea bed of the Israelis Exclusive Economic Zone.

Secondly, Turkey plans to establish a chain of coalitions with Muslim and Arab countries. To this end, it promotes idealistic and religious criteria (Voice of America, 2011)⁴. In other words, it wants to formulate a wider coalition comprising of a common Muslim system of values and principles. From a realistic point of view, such a coalition cannot be relied only on the Muslim system of values and principles, but also on interests and political, economic and institutional power that Turkey may acquire in case of joining the EU. If Turkey accedes to the EU, we may observe history to repeat itself in view of establishing a second EU capital as happened with the separation of Roman Empire. The one will be in Brussels and the other in Istanbul, representing the Muslim populations within and outside of the European external legal borders (Charalambides 2010 p. 190-191). Pursuant to Yasser Yiakis, Istanbul is the epicenter of an important geostrategic circle, including many European, African and Asia countries.

As Yiakis maintains:

“Such a circle will cover the major part of areas where the history of the world is shaped. It will cover almost all of the European countries, North Africa, the Caucasus and the entire Middle East. 70% of the gas oil reserves lie in this geography. 40% of the world oil and gas is consumed in the geography. Most of the conflicts that fill the agenda of world oil and gas is consumed in this geography. Most of the conflicts that fill the agenda of the international relations take place in the areas that are covered by this circle. It is not easy to draw a circle with similar effects, if you take its centre another major metropolis in the world” (2011).

This strategic and geopolitical position reminds us of a new version of the "heart land" theory as Halford John Mackinder (Dikshit 2006, p. 90-91) and Nikola Spyckman (Spyckman, 1939) set forth at the dawn of the 20th century. Moreover, Yiakis' theory is in line with the geopolitical concept of the "silk road" and falls under the Turkish energy strategy, which aims for Turkish domination in the Eurasian region. Under these circumstances, Turkey will become a locus of interests and oil crossroad (Yakis 2011, Turkish Foreign Policy 2009). Ankara's Administration plans to enhance its pivotal geopolitical location and thus presenting itself as an indispensable international actor through which the US and the EU can safely and reliably advance their national interests.

The Muslim and Arab world has been engaged in a perpetual conflict with Israel for many years. The core issue of this conflict lies in the unresolved Palestinian question. Furthermore, this historical military and political dispute is an excellent opportunity for the Turkish foreign policy to advance a "paternalistic model" of action. The US always places at the top of its international agenda the solution of the Palestinian issue, whilst Turkey pursues to get actively involved in such diplomatic efforts, with the purpose of serving its national interests (Obama 2009). Not only the US, but the entire international community, realizes that with the Palestinian issue unsolved, no common ground can be found between Israel and Arabs and especially with the hardliner forces of Islam. If the extreme wing Islamic organizations of "Hamas" and "Hezbollah" have no intention to put guns away, then no peace can be achieved. Nor we can safely predict that Muslim uprisings will induce domestic and regional stability. The existing situation shows that the Arab Spring has turned into a cold and chaotic winter!

Muslim societies differ from the western ones as they still depend on their religious system of values. This system of values defines and yet restricts political options and thus eroding the soundness of government decision making. At the same time, no one knows or can safely foresee what might be the role and political attitude of the extremist Islamic organizations within the new revolutionist political systems. In relevance, we cannot predict whether the resultant political situation would be better or worse in comparison with the past. The Iraqi model is a good example illustrating the reasons that caused the

⁴ According to the Voice of America " The Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan departs Monday on a four-day diplomatic visit to North Africa, in a trip aimed at expanding Turkey's growing influence in a region full of political upheaval" (2011).

existing bad situation, despite the fact that the efforts of the international community are focused on the establishment of a democratic political system. Pertinent problems are evident in Libya where the first stage of the rebels' victory was stigmatized by anarchy and chaos. On the other hand, an anarchic and chaotic situation could never be an excuse for accepting any dictatorial regime to stay in power. Although the Arab and Muslim peoples revolted during the spring of 2011, democracy has not flourished yet. The rebels have no democratic institutional experience and since they really wish to build new democratic political systems, they should start from scratch. Thus, the international community should find the best possible policies and mechanisms to support Muslim and Arab countries for a smooth and rational normalization and democratization. Since this aspiration remains impossible to achieve, the regional system will continue to be volatile.

The current strategic vacuum in the Arab and Muslim World needs to be filled by traditional or raising leading countries. Turkey is one of the main actors of the regional system and it has already put in effect a "paternalistic model" of action and thus triggered the reaction of Israel. Turkish Foreign Policy does not rely only on the idealistic and religious criteria, but on the service of national interests as well. Therefore, we must see and analyze the Turkish policy under the spectrum of Realism. Why? Turkey is a significant actor with a strategic role in the international and regional system. Turkey, as most states, implements policies which provide idealistic and moral arguments and principles in order to advance its national interests, whether legitimate or not (Sammis 2000, pp. 30, Ifestos 1994, pp. 323 -324). In other words, states' political apparatus are devoted to advance national interest through the establishment of coalitions or in the context of good neighbourhood policies. This is a rational political behaviour which is adopted and performed by Turkey as a state aspiring to play a leading role in the regional and global system. In this regard, Turkey flirts with Muslim peoples, even with Iran (Elik 2011, *Karmon 2001*, *Biresselioglu 2010*), deemed by the US as a trouble maker of the international system and a permanent threat. This policy seems to be a strategic procedure, which can obviously threaten Israeli national interests and security.

Given the twofold Turkish policy (the one foot in Europe and the other in Muslim and Arab world), which aims at becoming regional power, a relevant question should be set: is Turkey the new rising regional power and Israel the declining one? In this respect, Thucydides is up to date, as he underlines that: "the growth of the power of Athens and the alarm which this inspired in Lacedaemon, made war inevitable" (Thucydides, 1951, p. 15, Blanco, Roberts 1998). Otherwise, a crisis cannot be excluded as a possibility. We are in fact eyewitnesses of a rational game under the US guardianship. However, the Israeli-Turkish relations will continue to balance riskily as there is no sign that either one or the other side has a political intention to modify its national goal. If we accept that the existing Turkish policy results from the ideological and religious identity of the AKP, as well as from the advance of the Turkish national interests, and if the AKP - which won the elections on 12 June 2011 - rules the country for the next four years (Konda 2011), we come to the following conclusion: the Turkish Prime Minister Tayyip Erdoğan will persist to pursue a leading role in the Muslim world and he will never abandon his country's ambition to join the EU (Bağış)⁵. In any case, the problem between Turkey and Israel is evident and therefore a new question is raised: will the US let its allies get into a conflicting situation?

⁵ As the Chief negotiators of the Turkish Accession Talks with the EU, Egemen Bağış stated on September 28, 2011, in the framework of the Joint Parliamentary Committee between Turkey and the EU, his country will never abandon the aim of becoming an EU full member states (Personal notes of the writer).

EXPLOSIVE SITUATION AND AXIS

Looking carefully at the Middle East map, one may realize that Israel is surrounded by a number of enemies or potential ones and that it has no way out other than shaping a geopolitical axis along with Cyprus and Greece toward Europe. The political landscape is always explosive and this estimate has been portrayed by the bloody incidents which occurred between the 18th and 20th of August 2011 (CNN, 2011). The Israeli army retaliated to the terrorist actions against innocent tourists that took place close to the Sinai borders. Seven tourists were killed and Tel Aviv accused Egypt of not taking control over its borders. As a result of the Israeli military raids, mainly launched against “ Hamas ” targets, five Egyptians lost their lives. Under these circumstances, Egypt recalled its ambassador in Tel Aviv and further escalation of the crisis was averted by intensive American diplomatic efforts as the US want to keep stability in the region.

Whilst Israel encounters severe troubles with its Arab neighboring countries, Cyprus is experiencing Turkish occupation and continuous military threat. The deposits of gas and oils as well as conflicting and converging national interests, shape a new geopolitical environment and fertile ground for the establishment of a Cypriot–Israeli coalition, based on the advance of common interests. Upon analyzing the existing geopolitical situation and the options that Israel has on exploring and exploiting its natural gas resources, we underscore the following:

- a) First option, to install a pipeline from Israel to Egypt where natural gas is to be liquefied and then be transferred to Europe and elsewhere via vessels.
- b) Second option, to install a pipeline from Israel to Ceyhan where natural gas is to be liquefied and then transferred to Europe and elsewhere with vessels; or to use a pipeline passing through Turkish territory. Third option, to install a pipeline from Israel to Cyprus, where liquefied natural gas is transferred via shipping in Europe and elsewhere (Charalambides 2011b, cited in Simerini, 2011, p. 10).

Israel cannot advance its national interests through the first and second option. Both Egypt and Turkey present themselves as regional powers and constitute the main Israel’s rivalries. In this respect, if Israel goes for the first and second options, it will depend on Egypt and Turkey. Thus, one may argue that this is a strategically wrong decision as the Israelis have no intention and reason to enhance the Turkish and Egyptian geopolitical and geostrategic importance, especially during a period where their relations are on knife’s edge. On September 2, 2011, Turkey expelled the Israeli ambassador from Ankara. Pursuant to Turkish President Abdullah Gül it was the first measure that his country took as Israel did not apologize to Ankara for the nine Turkish citizens who lost their lives in the bloody flotilla’s incidents (ET World, 2011). The Turkish government disputed the report on the bloody incidents, prepared by former New Zealand Prime Minister Geoffrey Palmer and former Colombian President Alvaro Uribe. The report, which had been unofficially circulated on May 10, 2011, was presented to the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. One may allege that it is a balanced report. On the one hand, it cites that the Israeli raid was “ *excessive and unreasonable* ”. On the other hand, the spokesman of the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Mark Regev underlines the following:

“The UN commission clearly states that Israel acted legally in imposing the naval blockade to protect our people from the smuggling of rockets and weapons that are fired at our civilians”. (Sunday’s Zaman 2011).

In parallel, the Turkish government evoked the legal order and officially expressed its political will to appeal to the International Court. As Davutoğlu said:

“What is binding is the International Court of Justice. This is what we are saying: let the International Court of Justice decide. We are starting the necessary legal procedures this coming week”. Davutoğlu took a step

further supporting that: "If Israel persists with its current position, the Arab spring will give rise to a strong Israel opposition as well as the debate on the authoritarian regimes".

Responding to the Turkish allegation, the Deputy Foreign Minister, Danny Ayalon maintained on September 2, 2011 that his country has nothing to apologize and stated:

"The problem here is on the Turkish side. ... They were not ready for a compromise and kept raising the threshold. I think we need to say to the Turks: as far as we are concerned, this saga is behind us. Now we need to cooperate. Lack of cooperation harms not only us, but Turkey as well" (Sunday's Zaman, 2011)

CONFLICTING TRIANGLE

A few days later, a "conflicting triangle", between Israel, Egypt and Turkey, was to be shaped. Whilst Turkey disputed with Israel, on September 10, 2001 the Israeli ambassador in Egypt was forced to leave the country over a night as Egyptian demonstrators invaded and destroyed the Israeli embassy in Cairo. The US intervened diplomatically and asked from the Egyptian Authorities to send the vandals before the Court and punish them. Neither the Israeli government nor the Egyptian Military Forces - which rule the country in the transitional period – have the political intention to sever diplomatic relations. Israel announced that their ambassador would return to Egypt. However, the tension continued as the Turkish Prime Minister Tayyip Erdoğan was planning to visit Cairo, expressing also his political intention to pass through Egypt toward the Palestinian Authority. The Egyptians opposed and never gave him the green light to pass through. Erdoğan did not postpone his trip to Egypt. However Davutoğlu stated that his Prime Minister would not visit the Palestinian Authority.

THE THEORY OF A "TURKISH SEAS"

The conflicting political environment was not restricted within a "triangle", composed by Israel, Egypt and Turkey. On the contrary, whilst the Egyptian Authorities cancelled Erdoğan's visit to the Palestinian Authorities, Egemen Bağış warned that if the Republic of Cyprus starts drilling "plot 12", called Aphrodite, then Turkey will be ready to take military measures! As Bağış sated, Turkey trains its army in order to mobilise it in a proper time. More precisely, the Turkish minister said:

"These kinds of things that have happened in the past [Turkish naval interference with exploration] whenever the Greek Cypriots have made such attempts may well happen again. That is how serious Turkey is. Doing this in waters where they have no jurisdiction is illegal. Turkey will rely on international law to pursue its rights to the fullest extent". And he added: "This is what we have the navy for. We have trained our marines for this; we have equipped the navy for this. All options are on the table; anything can be done". (Yanatam, 2011, cited in Sunday's Zaman, Loizou 2011 cited in Simerini, p. 13).

This belligerent rhetoric was the prelude of a diplomatic and military tension that Ankara put in effect under the argument of defending its national interests and protecting the Turkish Cypriot interests. However, this way of action implies the revisionist Turkish policy which means a strategy including efforts to render Turkey as an undisputable regional power. In the same context, Ankara opposes to both Cyprus and Israel exploring and exploiting their gas and probably oil deposits as its geopolitical and geostrategic role would be at stake. Turkish policy and strategy considers that territorial waters from Marmaris to Iskenderun constitute a "closed Turkish lake" (Erdoğan 2011). A few days later, he added that the entire Mediterranean Sea is a "Turkish Sea". Therefore, if Cyprus and Israel were to get into the gas production and market, the Turkish strategic plan would be threatened by the "new players" and Ankara could not present itself any more as the only supplier of gas and oil toward the EU, through the

pipelines lying on its territory. The Turkish government expressed its political intention to send three frigates in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea and the research ship “Piri Reis” in order to start surveys even in the Exclusive Economic Zone of the Republic of Cyprus. “Noble Energy” accomplished successfully its survey within the Cyprus Exclusive Economic Zone and Turkey continued to a great new fait accompli by signing agreements with the occupying Turkish Cypriots Authorities and thus its military vessels sailed in the Cyprus territorial waters.

In attempting to explain Turkish policy we maintain the following:

1. As Israel continues to impose embargo over the Palestinian territories, Turkey alleges that it feels the obligation to guarantee the free navigation in the international waters. In the meantime, the Turkish Prime Minister Tayyip Erdoğan organized a strategic tour in Egypt, Tunisia and Libya, giving the impression that Turkey is the most important Muslim leading country, which can successfully defend their interests. In addition, the visits of the Turkish Prime Minister had multiple political and strategic dimensions:
 - a) to create fertile ground for the establishment of new coalitions; b. to cover Turkey's back in case of a crisis with Israel and Cyprus. However, a coin has always two sides. Egyptian analysts and the “Muslim Brotherhood” were very suspicious about Erdoğan’s visit in Egypt, deducing that the Turkish government aims at filling the leading political gap resulting from the volatile political situation in Egypt. In this respect, they did not give any support to the Turkish strategic task, which aims at replacing Egypt’s leading role in the Muslim and Arab World. Thus, we have three stages of a “power game” where Turkey is engaged in. The first stage is that of the EU, the second is that of Israel and the third is that of Egypt! It is obvious that the Turkish strategy to become a regional power seems to be like a “double sword” encompassing both visible and invisible risks.
2. Cyprus drilled “plot 12” and intends to drill other plots, lying in its Exclusive Economic Zone, and furthermore to exploit its gas deposits. According to the Turkish arguments: a) the Greek Cypriots have no legal right to drill “plot 12” since the natural resources belong to the Turkish Cypriots who are not represented by the Greek Cypriots; b) as far as the Cyprus issue remains unresolved, the Greek Cypriots cannot explore nor exploit the national resources of gas and oil.
3. Turkey and the Turkish Cypriot leadership do not recognize the Republic of Cyprus, which is in fact the only state in the island that both the UN and the EU recognize. In this regard, we must underline that, from the legal point of view, the gas and oil natural resources fall under the sovereign rights of the Republic of Cyprus. In the spirit and practice of a diplomatic, strategic and legal “equivalent fait accompli”, the Turkish government signed on September 21, 2011 with the illegal Turkish Cypriot leadership an agreement with a twofold character. The one aspect focuses on delineating their “continental shelf” and the other on carrying out surveys for exploring gas and oil at the northern, even at the western territorial waters of Cyprus. The Republic of Cyprus argues that the agreement, which has been signed between Turkey and the so called “Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus”, is illegal and invalid. The legal arguments provided by the Republic of Cyprus are the following: a. The UN Security Council issued two relevant resolutions, 541 and 550, flatly stating that the so called “Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus” is not valid. b. The EU declaration, which was officially circulated on October 5 2005, makes it clear that the only state the EU and its member states recognize on the island is the Republic of Cyprus.
4. Since Turkey does not recognize the Republic of Cyprus and did not sign the Convention of the International Law of the Sea, it does not recognize the delineation of the EEZ between Cyprus and Israel. In pursuant to the Turkish government, the EEZ between Turkey, Israel and Cyprus will be

delineated after the solution of the Cyprus issue. This solution will be based on the concept of the two “constituent states”. The one will be under the Greek Cypriots and the other under the Turkish Cypriot’s administrative control in the context of a political system, which is not clear whether there will be a federation or confederation.

Which is the moral argument provided by the Turkish policy? Turkish government attempts to ground its argument upon its ethical and legal obligation to defend the rights of the Turkish Cypriot Community, as they stem from the Zurich and London Agreement. In this respect, one may argue that this policy is morally correct. However, the Turkish troops have been continuously stationed in the northern part of the island, keeping the Turkish Cypriots in isolation and depriving from the Greek Cypriots the free exercise of their legal, constitutional and any other human rights deriving from the Zurich and London Agreement, the international law and the “*acquis communautaire*”. Under these conditions, one may also stress that the Turkish moral argument is based on an unethical and immoral policy, which breaches the international and European legal order.

Despite the Turkish objections, Cyprus has already delineated its EEZ. However, in the case of Greece, Turkey has silently set a “*casus belli*”. Ankara alleges that Greece has no right to delineate its own EEZ in the region of the island of Kastelorizo. The Turkish legal argument is grounded on the allegation that the Mediterranean Sea is a “closed Sea” and therefore islands have no legal right of delineating their own EEZ. Beyond the Turkish legal argument, there is a strategic concept supporting that if Turkey stops “vetoing” the Greek sovereign rights and gives the green light, the Greek EEZ will adjoin the Cyprus one. In this case, Turkey could not expand its own EEZ toward Egypt and could not realize its strategic plan of turning the territorial waters - extending from Marmaris to Iskenderun - into a Turkish lake! In light of these facts mentioned above, a number of significant strategic questions are raised: what would be the Turkish reaction if Greece delineates its EEZ and then signs a relevant agreement with Cyprus and establishes a coalition with Israel? Would Turkey trigger a military crisis? Would it launch an attack against Greece striking, at the same time, the Israelis, the EU and even the US interests, as “Noble Energy”, the company which took over to explore and exploit the gas and oil deposits within the Cyprus and Israel EEZ, belongs to American shareholders and interests? Would that mean or not the inglorious end of the Turkish accession negotiations to the EU? Would the US allow the region to blow up?

PREVENTIVE REASONS

Whether the US will act or not as a preventive power in case of a crisis, constitutes a fundamental issue, which must be scrutinized. On September 17, 2011, Hilary Clinton intervened diplomatically to avert an imminent crisis by calling upon Turkey to show self-restraint and refrain from any threats that may create a dangerous situation with Israel. The preventive political practice of Hilary Clinton was followed by a meeting between President Obama and Prime Minister Tayip Erdoğan. The US never “twisted Turkey’s ear” as the American aim was not to offend Turkey but to prevent the crisis. The US still considers Turkey as one of its major allies, mainly due to its efforts against terrorism. Besides, American policy never stopped considering Turkey as a valuable actor for improving its relations with Muslim and Arab world. Thus, the US holds a leash to the Turkish policy in order to avoid the crisis, but it turned a blind eye regarding the patrol of the Turkish warships in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea. In autumn 2011, the crisis was averted for the following reasons:

- a) American national interests, the regional security system as well as economic interests imposed the prevention of the crisis. The US could not afford political and military power to avert a new military clash.
- b) Israel has a strong military strength and a reliable preventive ability and does not hesitate to respond at once against any strike.

- c) Although Turkey created tension, it does not take any military action against Cyprus since the cost of such a belligerent option would be higher than any possible benefit. Besides, a diplomatic shield - comprising of American, Russian and other EU energy and economic interests - has been raised around Cyprus. The support, given to the Republic of Cyprus, was grounded on the fundamental principles of the UN Charter such as the respect for the exercise of the state's sovereign rights. The Conclusions issue by the European Council on December 9, 2010, call upon Turkey to refrain from any actions which may put the regional security at risk and to peacefully solve the problems that it raises against its neighboring countries.
- d) Cyprus has neither reliable military forces nor warship to hinder and keep away the Turkish military fleet from the Cyprus Republic territorial waters and the EEZ. Usually it takes two to tango. In the case of Cyprus we have only one. However, Cyprus is under constant Turkish threat and cannot fully defend its sovereign rights and its territorial integrity. Under these conditions, Turkey attempts to enforce a new "fait accompli" by putting in question the sovereignty of the Republic of Cyprus. Thus, Turkey puts in effect the "gunboat diplomacy" and plans to carry out surveys within the EEZ of Cyprus in the northern and western territorial waters of the island. Given the fact that the Doctrine of the "Single Defensive Space" between Cyprus and Greece does not exist anymore and that Greece suffers from an unhealthy and grim economic crisis, the question is whether Cyprus needs or not to establish new preventive strategic coalitions.

CRITERIA OF A STRATEGIC COALITION

The surveys and the exploitation of the gas and oil deposits which lie in the Exclusive Economic Zone of Cyprus, the political situation resulting from the "Arab Spring" and the "power game", where regional and potential regional powers as Egypt, Israel and Turkey have engaged in, created a conflicting situation. In this conflicting political environment, states should find allies, proper policies and mechanisms in order to advance or protect their national interests and furthermore achieve their strategic goals. Preventive policy constitutes an indispensable pillar of a wider strategy with a certain goal. It is also a rational response to external threats, which may put at risk national interests, territorial integrity and state's sovereignty. Given the fact that convergent national interests constitute a step stone upon which a coalition can be build, the question is whether Israel and Cyprus could sign and conclude a coalition and what the character of this coalition would be.

Taking into consideration the interconnected and conflicting relations between Israel-Cyprus on the one hand and Turkey on the other, one may argue that the pillars upon which a Cypriot-Israeli strategic coalition can be constructed are the following:

- a) Common interests. Both countries have explored hydrocarbons, (particularly gas) (ERBIC 2011, ERPIC 2011a) and therefore they could formulate a common policy for an effective and safe exploitation.
- b) Strategic situation. The enemy of my enemy is my friend. This is a cynical strategic tenet, which complies with the existing circumstances. In this context a "conflicting triangle" is created. Turkey is Cyprus' enemy and Israel is a Turkish enemy. Therefore, Israel could not only be a friend of Cyprus but also a strategic partner and vice versa. In this regard, if we consider that Cyprus is a strategic way out for Israel, at the same time, Israel can be seen by the Cypriots as a preventive shield against the Turkish threat.

We must cite another strategic parameter which is of utmost importance; the exploitation of natural gas resources in the Exclusive Economic Zone of Cyprus by "Noble Energy", serves American interests since it is a US based company. Therefore the USA is obliged by economic, moral and political reasons to protect the company from potential threats. One may argue that, in this case, the common interests of all

parties involved are in favor of establishing a coalition between Israel and Cyprus. It is evident that the US does not want any military clash between Cyprus and Turkey and mostly between Israel and Turkey, since the interests of an American company would be at stake. For the US it is a matter of principle. Thus, one may allege that even if the US does not openly support an Israeli-Cypriot coalition, at least it will show tolerance. The US is not the only actor and parameter that should be taken on board. Cyprus has to consider all the political parameters and actors before establishing such a coalition and therefore any decision should be taken and scheduled on the basis of a strategic concept. Otherwise, it may be trapped within a coalition in which a powerful Israel will have the upper hand and absolute military and geopolitical power, as well as any other control over the island. Under these circumstances, Cyprus can do almost nothing to protect itself in case of disagreements or divergence of national interests. As far as Cyprus continues to be under Turkish threat, it has no option other than establishing an alliance with Israel on the basis of common interests. Certainly, this alliance should be constructed on a strategic concept, which means the economic, commercial, military and any other cooperation so that both sides can safeguard their interests and prevent any threat which might be launched from Turkey. In terms of a “power game” (Morgenthau 1978), Turkey deems that it has the strategic right to control oil and gas deposits, although they lie in the sea bed of the Exclusive Economic Zone of Cyprus. Turkey has called Lebanon not to ratify its agreement with Cyprus regarding the delineation of their EEZ’s and urged Egypt to suspend a package of similar agreements it has signed with the Republic of Cyprus (ERPIC 2011, ERPIC 2011a). In November 2011, both sides (Cyprus and Lebanon) concluded an agreement and this certain issue had a successful end. Although, Turkish diplomatic efforts failed, since interest proved stronger than political pressures, Cyprus should be alert and ready to encounter various diplomatic and other problems created by Turkey, which is a state that never gives up.

CONCLUSION

The exploitation of gas and oil in the East Mediterranean region falls under the rules of strategic interests and “power games”. The legal aspect of the problem, reflected in the respect for International Law of the Sea, is used as a methodological tool to enshrine state’s sovereign rights and advance national interests. Should the parties involved wish to avoid a crisis, they must find rational ways of actions. These political formulas must be based on the International and European legal systems, the common interests and mutual respect. To achieve a regional system of common interests, we must consider the rules of the “power game” as we don’t live in a perfect international and regional system. Thus, stability, mutual respect and common interests should be firstly based on the “balance of power”, which must be shaped through strategic coalitions. We must approach and analyze the political situation in the South - Eastern Mediterranean region and the Middle East through the prism of the peculiar rival mentality, which reflects in a conflicting political and strategic environment. As gas and oil are raw strategic materials of development, prosperity and power, we must maintain the following: a possible coalition between Cyprus and Israel is not the only decisive factor in exploiting gas and oil. There is another one which is also important. It is the advance of the Great Powers’ interests through the engagement of their multinational colossus into the energy game. The service of the American and European, even the Russian interests:

- a) Could become a political and economic shield against any aggressive policy or crisis and the basis upon which a wider block of common interests could be formulated.
- b) Could create a fertile ground toward the shaping of a new geopolitical status quo and alliance, including, not only Cyprus, Israel and Greece, but also other countries. In this regard, Turkey could promote a flexible policy and thus produce more benefit than cost, by adopting and implementing a democratic policy in the context of a win –win situation in line with the international law and the *acquis communautaire*. This is a rational strategic game related to a democratic solution of the Cyprus issue, which may also help the Turkish accession to the EU.

In any case, the economic and political involvement of the EU, the US and Russia should take place in view of respecting state's sovereignty and thereby such an engagement could constitute a reliable and capable strategic recipe of protecting the "Cyprus pigeon" and holding in leash both the "White Shark" and the "Islamic hawks".

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