

# ***THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN ENERGY GEOPOLITICS: A “CYPRUS CENTRIC” ANALYSIS OF THE CURRENT AND FUTURE CHALLENGES***

Dr. Savvas Pappasavvas, Consultant/Strategy International, 00357-97786156, spapasavvas@strategyinternational.org

## **Overview**

Following the Republic of Cyprus (RoC) decision in 2013 to proceed with exploitation activities within its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and consequently its determination to be transformed from an almost exclusively energy consumer to a producer and an energy hub has caused the development of new agreements and synergies based on mutual interests. At the same time, though, it has driven the development of a new field of confrontation with the Turkey/Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) axis as the conflict between the sides would not be limited to the so-called "Cyprus Problem".

The non-synergy between the two sides has already caused delays to the particular energy program, has increased the risk of enterprises investing in this project and, in general, has discouraged possible stakeholders to invest in this program. However, in the post-Ukraine war era, both the existing and the potential additional natural gas reserves in the RoC EEZ have an increased value towards the EU's intention to become, at least partially, independent from the Russian energy reserves.

Thus, this project aims:

- (a) Under a "Cyprus-centric" framework, to make an overview of the main facts related to the Eastern Mediterranean energy security with the emphasis given in the period from 2016 and onwards.
- (b) To present the possible energy security challenges and opportunities in the upcoming years.

## **Methods**

As the RoC energy geopolitics is a relatively new area of study, it is still underdeveloped, and consequently and the existing peer-reviewed literature is still relatively limited. In contrast to the academic/secondary sources, there is a respected number of primary sources, including public statements and official documents, focusing on the RoC energy geopolitics. This lack of secondary and the relative abundance of primary sources has led us to apply a method of analysis focusing on discourse and, more specifically, on the statements made by the people impacting the RoC foreign and energy policy. In particular, we have decided to use a method referred to the literature as Political Discourse Analysis (PDA). According to Christina Schaffner (1996), PDA is a sub-category of general discourse analysis used for analyzing political statements. Also, Henrik Larsen (1997:23) has argued that "political discourse analysis can provide explanations regarding the way actors act and may provide an analysis deeper than the analysis of materialist structures."

At the same time, some scholars question its credibility and applicability. Among others, Isabella and Norman Fairclough (2012) have highlighted the lack of a clear distinction between political and other types of discourse analysis. Even though they share the same opinion with Larsen (1997) that a common view on political science can help, at the same time, they have argued that it is not an easy matter due to the complexity of the issues related to the state's interests. At the same time, we share the same view with George Berridge (2015), claiming that not all the issues discussed between decision-makers get in public.

The weaknesses mentioned above have left us with a dilemma; either trying to conceal the shortcomings of PDA or applying a second method simultaneously. This paper has used a second method and tries to verify or reject the findings originating from PDA. This second method is usually presented in the literature as "semi-structured elite interviewing" (Galleta, 2013). By definition, this is a method of interviewing based on the information collected and analyzed by leading experts on significant themes. Rathbun (2008) has characterized it as a unique method because it has allowed the researchers to ask elite people the questions to which they wanted answers. He has even described it as the most direct and targeted method in qualitative-based methodology.

Regarding the data analysis, we have used NVIVO software. According to Kristin Bazeley and Patricia Jackson (2019), the particular software can contribute to the completion of a project by managing data and ideas and organizing conceptual and theoretical knowledge generated from the project. Moreover, through NVIVO, we were able to query data, ask in simple terms complex questions stemming from the data, provide straightforward answers, and report and visualize them even through charts.

## Results

This paper has ended up to the following results:

(a) There are three groups of parameters all the stakeholders (states, organizations, enterprises) consider when discussing energy-related issues: the geopolitical, the economic and technological/environmental. However, the fact that each stakeholder hierarchies those parameters differently makes cooperation tricky.

(b) In the aftermath of the war in Ukraine, the RoC natural gas reserves can contribute to the transition of the EU to "green energy", as presented in the 2050 energy agenda.

(c) There are four possible ways to transfer the RoC and the Eastern Mediterranean energy reserves in general to the EU market: (a) a liquefaction facility in Cyprus, (b) a pipeline via Turkey, (c) through the "East Med" pipeline, (d) through the existing Egyptian gas pipeline. As presented in the paper, each of these alternatives has its pros and cons.

(d) The RoC must decide whether it wants to be primarily an energy producer or an energy hub with all the (geo)political and economic advantages and disadvantages of every decision.

(e) The intention of the RoC to harmonize its energy interests with those of the key regional players (Christodoulides, 2018) is not as easy as it looks on the first sign. The involvement of regional players with different interests makes their support for the particular program limited to specific actions that are different for each player. However, over the last decade, we have seen steps forward from the RoC by abandoning a monothematic policy within the EU organs and developing new bilateral agreements (Kasoulides, 2019). However, in particular cases, at least based on public statements, the RoC did not get the support expected for its energy program.

## Conclusions

The post war in Ukraine world, at least for the EU and its neighboring sub regions will be massively differentiated, at least in the area of energy geopolitics. This new developed environment apart from new challenges will also develop new opportunities. Regarding the Eastern Mediterranean energy geopolitics can be characterized as dynamic, fluid and inevitably regularly differentiated. Therefore, their analysis requires taking into consideration various parameters which are often multidisciplinary.

As part of this difficult equation the RoC energy program can contribute on fulfilling the EU energy agenda towards its independency from the Russia reserves. However, the opposition by the Turkey/TRNC axis requires a more active involvement both from the EU and also from the regional players. We must bear in mind that:

- The RoC has not signed the final agreements with the oil/gas enterprises in all the sea blocks.
- The East – Med pipeline is considered possible but is still on paper.
- Turkey upgrades its, independent, exploitation capabilities.
- There is not a clear view regarding the total amount of natural gas existing within the RoC subsoil.

Summarizing the above we believe the exploitation of hydrocarbons in the RoC EEZ enters a new period in the post Ukraine war era. The successful handling of the new threats and the taking advantage of the new opportunities will determine whether the RoC energy program will end up being a regional blessing or a curse.

## References

### Books

- Bazeley K & Jackson P (2019). *Qualitative Data Analysis with NVIVO*. London: SAGE Publications
- Berridge, G. (2015). *Diplomacy: Theory and Practice*. London: Springer.
- Galleta, A (2013). *Mastering the Semi-Structured Interview and Beyond*. New York and London: New York University Press
- Fairclough, I., & Fairclough, N. (2012). *Political Discourse Analysis: A Method for Advanced Students*. London: Routledge.
- Kasoulidis, I. (2019). *30 Years Present. Ideas and Thoughts for our Cyprus (in Greek)*. Nicosia: Kathimerini
- Larsen, H. (1997). *Foreign Policy and Discourse Analysis: France, Britain and Europe*. Oxfordshire: Taylor & Francis.

### Public Statements

Christodoulides, N. (2018, November 16). *The Republic of Cyprus National Security Strategy*. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IwJwZxBvRP0&t=611s>