

Between Energy and Politics: Cooperation among Israel, Greece, and the Greek Cypriot Administration of Southern Cyprus

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Abstract

This study examines the energy dimension of relations among Israel, Greece, and the Greek Cypriot Administration of Southern Cyprus. It argues that political interests and energy-related issues constitute the binding elements among regional actors. Cooperation in the field of energy contributes to the deepening of political relations among these actors. Accordingly, energy policies and political interests overlap in shaping inter-actor relations in the Eastern Mediterranean. Regional political relations gain momentum when the extraction, exploitation, sharing, and transportation of natural resources in the Eastern Mediterranean are taken into consideration. It is understood that political relations provide a foundation for economic relations expanded through cooperation in energy resources. The study claims that energy cooperation among the three actors has a significant impact on regional political relations..

Keywords: *Eastern Mediterranean, Natural Gas, Energy Cooperation, Political Relations, Trilateral Summit*

Introduction

The Eastern Mediterranean has historically been home to numerous civilizations and today constitutes a significant part of the Mediterranean basin, encompassing the coastlines of approximately ten countries from east to west. In the twenty-first century, the discovery of natural gas resources has altered the region's political landscape. States with longstanding rivalries and historical antagonisms have, at times, moved toward closer relations, while ongoing disputes have periodically caused stagnation in bilateral and regional relations.

The discovery of natural gas has become one of the primary factors shaping states' foreign relations. Issues such as the exploration, extraction, processing, and export of natural gas have compelled countries to engage in cooperation. Consequently, the foreign policies and regional relations of Eastern Mediterranean states have been reconfigured in line with the discovery of natural gas basins.

Israel, having been identified as a state possessing significant natural gas reserves, has sought to enhance its influence in the Eastern Mediterranean through energy resources. The Greek Cypriot Administration of Southern Cyprus, due to its geographical location on the island of Cyprus, is situated in close proximity to natural gas fields. Greece, located in the western part of the Mediterranean, occupies a crucial logistical position for the export of natural gas to

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European markets. Accordingly, these three actors have engaged in energy cooperation centered on natural gas.

The discovery of natural gas resources in the Eastern Mediterranean has not only reshaped political relations but has also demonstrated the region's potential to become an energy exporter. In order to enable natural gas exports and ensure access to global markets, various forms of cooperation have been established. Within this framework of natural gas cooperation—where Israel and Greece have emerged as key actors—other regional stakeholders have also been invited to participate. The Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF), established in 2019, has brought together regional countries under a cooperative framework.

It is also evident that states' political interests play a significant role in the cooperation required for both the extraction and marketing of natural gas. For instance, the exclusion of Turkey, a littoral state of the Eastern Mediterranean, from the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF) indicates that the cooperation among the three actors is also shaped by political considerations.

It is observed that the cooperation required both for the extraction of natural gas and for its transportation to international markets is shaped by the political interests of the states involved. For instance, the exclusion of Türkiye—despite being a littoral state of the Eastern Mediterranean—from the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF) indicates that the three actors in question seek to develop a framework of regional energy cooperation that deliberately excludes Türkiye. This exclusion further suggests a broader strategic objective: the construction of a regional political order in which Türkiye does not occupy a central or participatory role.

This study examines the natural gas cooperation among Israel, Greece, and the Greek Cypriot Administration of Southern Cyprus in the context of the Eastern Mediterranean. It argues that the discovery of hydrocarbon reserves has expanded energy cooperation among the three actors and that such cooperation possesses an inherently political dimension. In this regard, the principal contribution of the study to the literature lies in its normative assertion that the relationship among these actors should be understood not merely as economic coordination, but as a form of intertwined political and economic cooperation.

Like all scholarly inquiries, this study has certain limitations. It provides an analysis of natural gas cooperation among the three actors from the discovery of the Eastern Mediterranean hydrocarbon reserves to the present day. Ultimately, it concludes that energy cooperation among the three actors reinforces and consolidates their political relations. Political relations foster economic cooperation, while economic cooperation, in turn, strengthens political relations in a mutually constitutive dynamic.

Political Drivers of Cooperation among Israel, Greece, and the Greek Cypriot Administration of Southern Cyprus

Relations among Israel, Greece, and the Greek Cypriot Administration of Southern Cyprus tend to deepen particularly in circumstances that necessitate regional cooperation, when confronted with a common political rival, or when the articulation of a coordinated stance becomes imperative. From this perspective, the periodic acceleration and deceleration of Israel–Greece relations acquire analytical significance (Strigunov et al., 2022).



Greece's recognition of the Greek Cypriot Administration of Southern Cyprus as the sole legitimate authority on the island and its support for Cyprus's accession to the European Union have required Athens to pursue a strategic policy in the Eastern Mediterranean. Greece's strategic approach has led it to establish partnerships that recognize the Greek Cypriot Administration of Southern Cyprus—rather than the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus—as the legitimate authority on the island. When the energy and natural gas resources of the Eastern Mediterranean are incorporated into this equation, an additional dimension is added to the partnerships formed by Greece (Herranz-Surrallés, 2018).

Israel, which was established through the occupation of Palestinian territories, has formed partnerships that tend to legitimize and justify this occupation. Israel has demanded—indeed, presented as a precondition—that its relations with Eastern Mediterranean littoral states continue despite the ongoing occupation of Palestine. Although Israel has pursued diplomacy by developing bilateral and trilateral economic relations aimed at transporting Eastern Mediterranean natural resources to Europe over the years, it has not derived substantial benefits from these efforts. In recent years, however, Israel has sought greater returns from its increasingly close relations with Greece in the context of the exploitation of natural resources (Strigunov et al., 2022).

Greece, Israel, and the Greek Cypriot Administration of Southern Cyprus have all reinforced their regional relations and diplomatic engagements through economic cooperation. Within the diplomatic framework of Greece, Israel, and the Greek Cypriot Administration of Southern Cyprus, political relations have supported economic ties, while economic relations, in turn, have enabled political relations to gain broader institutional and strategic grounding (Herranz-Surrallés, 2018).

Turkey, which possesses the longest coastline in the Mediterranean, has emerged as a balancing actor in regional relations through its diplomacy in the Eastern Mediterranean, particularly following the Cyprus Peace Operation (Grigoriadis & Tsourapas, 2024). While Greece has sought to establish a single authority on the island under Greek Cypriot control, Turkey, as a guarantor state of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, has acted as an obstacle by defending the rights of the Turkish Cypriot community. The presence of Turkey and the Turkish-inhabited Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus in the Eastern Mediterranean underscores the reality that the island cannot be unilaterally controlled by the Greek Cypriots (Cropsey, 2015).

With regard to Israel's occupation of Palestinian territories, Turkey has been among the few states most strongly opposing this occupation and has applied to the International Criminal Court in an effort to halt Israel's actions (Bouroutis, 2025). This stance helps explain Israel's desire to establish a network of political and economic relations in the Eastern Mediterranean that excludes Turkey. Indeed, relations among Israel, Greece, and the Greek Cypriot Administration of Southern Cyprus have been structured largely as a counterbalance to Turkey, which is historically perceived as a rival or threat. It can be observed that during periods when Israel–Turkey, Greece–Turkey, and Greek Cypriot Administration of Southern Cyprus–Turkey bilateral relations have deteriorated, regional cooperation among these three actors has been strengthened as a means of producing alternatives to Turkey's regional influence (Ashwarya, 2017).

It has also been observed that political interest-based relations among Israel, Greece, and the Greek Cypriot Administration of Southern Cyprus have, at times, translated into economic cooperation. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the discovery of natural resources in the Eastern Mediterranean facilitated the implementation of projects that bypassed Turkey by states whose diplomatic relations with Ankara had weakened. Moreover, the presence of European countries seeking to diversify energy partnerships and access Eastern Mediterranean natural resources further reinforced relations among Israel, Greece, and the Greek Cypriot Administration of Southern Cyprus (Cropsey, 2015).

Energy Cooperation among Israel, Greece, and the Greek Cypriot Administration of Southern Cyprus

Relations among Israel, Greece, and the Greek Cypriot Administration of Southern Cyprus have been reshaped and have gained significance during periods marked by the discovery and export of natural resources in the Eastern Mediterranean. In the context of the sharing of natural gas resources and their transportation to Europe, the Greek Cypriot Administration of Southern Cyprus has been regarded as a connecting hub between Israel and Greece. For this reason, Israel and Greece have included the Greek Cypriot Administration of Southern Cyprus in their cooperative frameworks in order to establish Mediterranean linkages and to strengthen their political alignment (Ashwarya, 2017).

For the Greek Cypriot Administration of Southern Cyprus, a key significance of being included in these cooperative arrangements lies in the regional affirmation of its recognition as the sole authority on the island. Another important dimension concerns its linkage to European Union markets. Pursuing geopolitical objectives, Israel and Greece aim to enhance their geopolitical influence in the regional geography by integrating the Greek Cypriot Administration of Southern Cyprus into European Union markets (Navon, 2019).

The linkage between Israel and Greece in the region, together with the inclusion of the Greek Cypriot Administration of Southern Cyprus in cooperative arrangements, reflects economic cooperation derived from political alignment. The underlying driver behind the pursuit of regional political influence and the bypassing of Turkey's role in the region is primarily energy resources. Strategic objectives uniting these three actors include not only the exploitation of vast volumes of proven natural gas reserves but also the extension of electricity interconnector cables across the Mediterranean seabed to European markets (Kogan, 2021).

In 2010, the United States Geological Survey, while conducting natural gas reserve assessments in the Eastern Mediterranean, identified resource fields known as Tamar, Leviathan, and Aphrodite. These discoveries confirmed that the Eastern Mediterranean possesses abundant fossil fuel reserves. Transporting natural gas to Europe—one of the world's largest natural gas consumers—requires pipelines to traverse deep waters and cover long distances across the Mediterranean basin (Eilat, 2025).

Moreover, the installation of subsea natural gas pipelines, their transportation, and entry into export markets entail substantial costs. The deployment of offshore platforms and the establishment of related facilities involve complex, engineering-intensive processes. Furthermore, while oil prices are largely determined through futures contracts, natural gas pricing is based on negotiated agreements between suppliers and consumers. This characteristic of the natural gas market necessitates cooperation among states in the transportation and commercialization of gas resources (Eilat, 2025).



With the discovery of significant resource potential in the Eastern Mediterranean, Israel has emerged as one of the most prominent actors in the region. This development has enabled Israel to deepen its energy trade relations with Arab states, eventually becoming a natural gas supplier to Egypt and Jordan (Zisser, 2023).

In fact, among the actors involved, Israel holds the largest share of natural gas reserves in the region. The offshore discoveries known as Tamar and Leviathan are regarded as defining horizons for Israel's future. These natural gas reserves, which are expected to strategically influence the country's economic and political trajectory, are often interpreted as providing Israel with leverage to pursue an assertive and influential policy across the region. With estimated reserves of nearly 10 trillion cubic feet in Tamar and approximately 22 trillion cubic feet in the Leviathan offshore field, these resources also contribute to underpinning Israel's security as a regional actor (Wolfrum, 2019).

Leviathan is one of the largest natural gas reserves in the Eastern Mediterranean. The field's recoverable gas reserves are estimated at 635 billion cubic meters. Discovered in 2010, the Leviathan field began production in 2019 and has since become one of the region's most significant reserves. Israel currently produces approximately 12 billion cubic meters of natural gas annually from the Leviathan field. By 2025, revenues generated solely from the Leviathan gas field are estimated to reach nearly USD 2.5 billion. The primary purchasers of this natural gas are Israel's neighboring countries, Jordan and Egypt. Consequently, Israel has emerged as a major resource-holding country within its region. Chevron Mediterranean Ltd., which holds a 39.66 percent stake in the Leviathan gas field, is the largest operator of the reserve, while NewMed and Ratio Energies together hold a 45.34 percent share (Wolfrum, 2019).

Following the discovery of its natural gas reserves, Israel transitioned within a relatively short period from being a net natural gas importer to a net exporter. Chevron Mediterranean, an Israeli-based company, also operates the Tamar natural gas production field and the Aphrodite gas field located near the Greek Cypriot Administration of Southern Cyprus (Navon, 2019).

Seeking to expand its presence in the Mediterranean in terms of natural gas and energy resources, Israel has aimed to increase the capacity of its gas fields. Raising annual production at the Leviathan gas field to 21 billion cubic meters would represent an increase of approximately 30 percent in Israel's total annual natural gas output. If the expansion project is completed by 2029, Israel is expected to supply natural gas worth approximately USD 40 billion primarily to its region, while also increasing the share exported to European countries. This development would potentially enhance Israel's regional political influence (Kogan, 2021).

The Trilateral Summit established in 2015 among Israel, Greece, and the Greek Cypriot Administration of Southern Cyprus demonstrates that the Mediterranean policies of these countries converge both politically and economically. The discovery of natural gas reserves in areas adjacent to the Greek Cypriot Administration of Southern Cyprus indicates, from Israel's perspective, a natural partnership. Greece, by contrast, functions primarily as a political partner for Israel, while also serving as a strategically significant country capable of providing logistical support for the distribution of Israeli gas to European markets. In the Joint Declaration of the 10th Trilateral Summit held in 2025, the three countries explicitly stated that their regional partnership is largely driven by energy policies. In this context,

natural gas, subsea energy cables, and renewable energy resources were highlighted as areas in which the three countries demonstrate mutual economic and political interdependence (Kogan, 2021).

Natural gas constitutes a central pillar of energy projects between Israel and Greece, with the Greek Cypriot Administration of Southern Cyprus being included in these cooperative initiatives since 2015. At the tenth Trilateral Summit held in 2025, Israel, Greece, and the Greek Cypriot Administration of Southern Cyprus reaffirmed their strategic partnership in economic and energy cooperation, emphasizing their intention to undertake concrete steps to strengthen their alliance (Eilat, 2025).

By 2020, it had become evident that a new partnership based on economic cooperation in the field of natural gas had been established among neighboring countries across the Mediterranean. The initiative was formally named the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF) during a meeting held in Cairo, Egypt, in 2020 (Aslim, 2018). Recognized as an intergovernmental organization and headquartered in Cairo, the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum was established following the discovery of major natural gas fields in the Eastern Mediterranean basin. The founding members include Israel, Greece, Cyprus (the Greek Cypriot Administration of Southern Cyprus), the Palestinian Authority, Italy, Egypt, and Jordan. In addition to these seven founding members, representatives from the World Bank and the European Union, as well as representatives of the United States and France—both of which have sought permanent observer status—also participated (Sukkarieh, 2021).

The exclusion of Turkey from the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF), despite being the country with the longest coastline in the Mediterranean, has been particularly noteworthy (Zisser, 2023). Although Turkey possesses maritime jurisdiction areas in the Eastern Mediterranean, the EMGF was coordinated with the aim of revealing and sharing the potential of offshore natural gas wealth in the region without allowing Turkey to obtain a share of these resources. Established without Turkey's participation, the EMGF has sought to isolate Turkey within the Eastern Mediterranean context (Aslim, 2018). Nevertheless, Turkey has not endorsed any initiative that would undermine its geopolitical presence in the Eastern Mediterranean. In fact, the core issue opposed by Turkey has been the application of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), as its implementation carries the risk of effectively enclosing the Eastern Mediterranean (Eilat, 2025).

Developments within the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum have predominantly favored Israel. Through energy cooperation, Israel has aimed to extend its political relations across the Mediterranean and into Europe. Moreover, the EastMed natural gas pipeline, which offers a direct connection to Europe, demonstrates Israel's intention to integrate with European countries not only economically but also in terms of energy security. Establishing a direct natural gas link with Europe would solidify Israel's role as an energy exporter. Energy trade with European countries would also limit the ability of Arab states to exert political or economic pressure on Israel (Gafarli, 2020).

It is argued that the objectives Israel seeks to achieve through the EastMed natural gas project contradict those of the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF). While the EastMed project enables Israel to reach European countries directly, it effectively bypasses the EMGF member states. As a result, the scope for collective natural gas cooperation among EMGF members in the Eastern Mediterranean would be reduced. Consequently, natural gas



cooperation partnerships in the Eastern Mediterranean would remain largely potential rather than being translated into concrete outcomes. Moreover, due to its high costs, the EastMed natural gas pipeline project is widely regarded as economically unsustainable (Gafarlı, 2020).

Having become the second-largest natural gas producer in the Eastern Mediterranean after Egypt within a relatively short period, Israel is able to allocate a significant share of its production for export due to its small population. Furthermore, owing to the limited energy consumption in the Palestinian territories under Israeli occupation, Israel has exported nearly half of its natural gas production in recent years (International Crisis Group, 2023).

The primary motivation behind Israel's willingness to cooperate with regional countries lies in existing geopolitical and infrastructural constraints. Seeking to maximize the benefits derived from its resources, Israel aims to increase its natural gas exports by strengthening cooperation with neighboring countries and enhancing links to Europe. Such cooperation is also expected to help mitigate disputes with regional states. Israel views natural gas exports as carrying both economic and political significance and has increasingly regarded natural gas as a strategic instrument for establishing economic ties with neighboring countries and integrating itself more firmly into the regional order (Sukkarieh, 2021).

Strengthening cooperation primarily brings countries to the forefront of regional influence through economic means. As Israel becomes economically stronger, it simultaneously establishes a physical connection with European countries via the Mediterranean. Once the project is completed, Israel's physical linkage to Europe is expected to enhance its regional diplomacy. For Israel, located in the eastern Mediterranean, reaching the westernmost parts of the Mediterranean in both economic and diplomatic terms will thus become feasible (International Crisis Group, 2023).

Greece, similar to Israel, stands to gain not only geopolitical but also economic benefits from these developments. As a country extending from southern Europe into the Eastern Mediterranean, Greece is likely to pursue a more assertive regional policy. Having accumulated significant diplomatic leverage through the accession of the Greek Cypriot Administration of Southern Cyprus to the European Union and through the recognition of the island as a single state, Greece may adopt a more dominant political posture in the subsequent period (Sukkarieh, 2021).

The gains of the Greek Cypriot Administration of Southern Cyprus largely overlap with those of Greece. No longer isolated from the European Union's energy policies, the Greek Cypriot Administration of Southern Cyprus approaches these gains with diplomatic prudence. It is anticipated that, by seeking to benefit fully from the European Union's broader economic policies, the Greek Cypriot Administration of Southern Cyprus may eventually attempt to exert diplomatic pressure on Türkiye in order to secure international acceptance of its status as the sole legitimate state on the island (Cropsey, 2015).

Conclusion

Energy cooperation among Israel, Greece, and the Greek Cypriot Administration of Southern Cyprus has been fundamentally shaped by the discovery of natural gas reserves in the Eastern Mediterranean basin. Within this framework of cooperation—where political relations and strategic interests occupy a central position—it becomes evident that the participating states derive both political and economic advantages.

It is observed that the political relations of Israel, Greece, and the Greek Cypriot Administration of Southern Cyprus overlap significantly with regional alignments and economic incentives. Consequently, their relations are sustained politically while simultaneously expanding across a broad economic terrain. The discovery of natural gas resources has deepened these relations and rendered them more strategically meaningful, particularly in light of the prospect of exporting gas to European markets.

The Trilateral Summit, initiated in 2015, constitutes a clear indication that the three actors sought to institutionalize and broaden their cooperation in both political and economic spheres. The tenth summit, held in 2025, demonstrated the continuity of this framework and reaffirmed the intention to expand economic relations, particularly in the field of energy. Although each actor pursues distinct political and economic objectives, the summit process has functioned as a consolidating mechanism for their overlapping interests.

The Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF), institutionalized in 2020, has been widely interpreted as an initiative that effectively excludes Türkiye from emerging regional energy configurations. States planning to export natural gas to Europe without Türkiye risk encroaching upon Türkiye's declared maritime jurisdiction areas in the Eastern Mediterranean. In this context, the EastMed natural gas pipeline project has been regarded as the most significant initiative enabling Israel to export gas directly to Europe. Nevertheless, the project is widely acknowledged to face structural and geopolitical constraints. Its limited inclusivity and failure to incorporate all Eastern Mediterranean stakeholders raise concerns regarding its long-term sustainability.

This study analyzes the economic and political relations among Israel, Greece, and the Greek Cypriot Administration of Southern Cyprus. It first examines their political relations and identifies converging strategic objectives among the three actors. It subsequently evaluates their energy cooperation, demonstrating that regional political aims underpin the development of energy partnerships. In this respect, political alignment is shown to reinforce energy cooperation, while energy collaboration further consolidates political convergence.

Overall, the political relations and energy cooperation of the three actors appear to operate in a mutually reinforcing and synchronized manner. In the Eastern Mediterranean context, cooperation in natural gas exploration and export—particularly with the objective of supplying European markets—has drawn the three actors into closer alignment. At the same time, pursuing regional cooperation and gas exports to Europe without the participation of Türkiye constitutes a shared strategic objective.

Indeed, relations among Israel, Greece, and the Greek Cypriot Administration of Southern Cyprus originated in the political sphere but have evolved and been sustained through energy cooperation. Energy resources have thus emerged as the principal domain of partnership among the three actors. Electricity interconnections and natural gas cooperation across the Mediterranean generate differentiated benefits for each party. Furthermore, the inclusion of the Greek Cypriot Administration of Southern Cyprus in these cooperative frameworks appears to gain momentum particularly in response to what is perceived as a common strategic competitor—Türkiye.



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