

PAPER DETAILS

TITLE: CYPRUS AND EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN ISSUES IN TÜRKİYE REPORTS

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PAGES: 103-134

ORIGINAL PDF URL: <https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/download/article-file/4259947>

To cite this article: Özsoy, B. (2024). Cyprus and Eastern Mediterranean Issues in Türkiye Reports. International Journal of Social and Humanities Sciences (IJSHS), 8(2), 103-134

Submitted: June 27, 2024

Accepted: August 19, 2024

CYPRUS AND EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN ISSUES IN TÜRKİYE REPORTS

Bahar Özsoy¹

ABSTRACT

This article analyses the Eastern Mediterranean and Cyprus issues in the Türkiye Reports in terms of Türkiye's European Union (EU) membership perspective. The dispute over Cyprus is not only one of the major problems in Türkiye-Greece relations but also the main obstacle in Türkiye's accession negotiations process. In 2004, following the accession of the Greek Administration of Southern Cyprus (GASC) to the EU and gaining importance for energy in the Eastern Mediterranean in the same period, the pressures on Türkiye started to increase. Although Cyprus and accession negotiations have continued in the intervening period, it is seen that the process has been blocked, especially in the last five years, due to Türkiye's active policies prioritising its own interests in the region. At this point, it can be concluded that the lack of a solution only favours the Greek Cypriot side. Türkiye is excluded from the cooperation process in the Eastern Mediterranean and is moving away from the EU target.

Keywords: EU, Türkiye, Eastern Mediterranean, Cyprus

TÜRKİYE RAPORLARINDA KIBRIS VE DOĞU AKDENİZ SORUNLARI

ÖZET

Bu makale, Türkiye Raporlarında yer alan Doğu Akdeniz ve Kıbrıs konularını Türkiye'nin AB'ye üyelik perspektifi açısından ele almaktadır. Kıbrıs üzerindeki anlaşmazlık Türkiye-Yunanistan ilişkilerindeki önemli sorunlardan biri olmasının yanında Türkiye'nin katılım müzakereleri sürecindeki temel engeldir. 2004 yılında GKRY'nin AB'ye üye olmasının ve aynı dönemde Doğu Akdeniz'in enerji açısından önem kazanmasının ardından Türkiye üzerindeki

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baskılar artmaya başlamıştır. Aradan geçen dönemde Kıbrıs ve katılım müzakereleri sürmekle birlikte özellikle son beş yılda -Türkiye'nin bölgede kendi menfaatlerini önceleyen aktif politikalarının da etkisiyle-sürecin tıkanıp görülmektedir. Geline nokta çözümsüzlüğün sadece Kıbrıs Rum tarafının lehine olduğu; Türkiye'nin Doğu Akdeniz'deki iş birliği sürecinden dışlandığı ve AB hedefinden uzaklaştığı görülmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: AB, Türkiye, Doğu Akdeniz, Kıbrıs

INTRODUCTION

Dating back more than 60 years, Türkiye-EU relations is one of the most essential pillars of Turkish foreign policy. Political, economic and cultural ties have made the EU a strategic target for Türkiye. Negotiations have been ongoing since 2005 under the shadow of the obstacles of some countries within the EU, religious-demographic factors, Türkiye's revised foreign policy strategy and the weakening willingness of the parties over time. However, the energy resources discovered in the Eastern Mediterranean during the best period of relations with the EU constitute one of the main areas of disagreement between the parties today.

Although the Eastern Mediterranean stands out with its economic potential for a lot of countries, it has become primarily a sovereignty issue for Türkiye. In the recent years, Ankara has reacted with an independent policy to the energy agreements made by the GASC ignoring the rights of Turkish Cypriots, international initiatives isolating Türkiye, and military contracts concluded with the USA and France. Following the 2011 agreement with Northern Cyprus and the 2019 agreement with Libya, energy exploration activities were increased and third countries were not allowed to carry out exploration and production activity in areas overlapping with Türkiye's maritime jurisdiction. The activities of Türkiye, which declares that the GASC is not a state representing the whole island, are recognised as "illegal" by the EU.

The main limitation of the study is that other topics mentioned in the Reports are ignored. Yet, the importance of Türkiye's Cyprus policy, which has led to the veto of the opening of a number of chapters, and the concrete steps taken in the Eastern Mediterranean in recent years are the major determinants of the accession process. This study focuses on Cyprus and the Eastern Mediterranean issues that have

been turned into a problem by the European Union, within the framework of the Türkiye Reports. In this context, firstly, Türkiye's EU membership process from a historical perspective is given and then the importance of Cyprus and the Eastern Mediterranean in Turkish foreign policy is discussed. In the last section, the Cyprus and Eastern Mediterranean issues are analysed in the Türkiye Reports published since 1998.

HISTORY OF TURKISH EU MEMBERSHIP

Following the adoption of Western legal system and values by the Republican administration, the development of relations with the West has been one of the main priorities with the transition to multi-party life. After the World War II, Türkiye, which was a member of institutions and organisations established to guarantee peace and security among nations, applied to the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1959 in order to ensure its integration with the West. The Ankara Agreement concluded in 1963 has created a partnership between Türkiye and the EEC. The aim of the agreement, which constitutes the legal basis of relations with the European Union (EU), is to promote the continuous and balanced strengthening of trade and economic relations between the parties (Art.2). In Article 28 of the Treaty, it is stated that Türkiye will join the EEC on condition that the parties fulfil their obligations arising from membership (Art.28). The Treaty envisaged three phases for the integration of Türkiye into the EEC, namely the Preparatory, Transition and the Final Periods (Art.3). The first phase started as of 1 December 1964, when the agreement entered into force. During this period, which was determined as a 'preparatory period' to reduce the economic differences between the parties, Türkiye did not undertake any obligations, but various institutions were created between the two parties for the functioning of the established partnership relationship. By the 13 November 1970 Additional Protocol, which entered into force in 1973, the preparatory period envisaged in the Ankara Agreement was ended and the conditions for the 'transition period' were determined. The aim of this period is to ensure the free movement of industrial products, agricultural products and persons between the parties and to complete the Customs Union (CU). It was envisaged for Türkiye to gradually eliminate customs duties on industrial products originating from the EU and a 22-year period was given to Türkiye for the de facto entry into force of the CU. However, the military

coup d'état in Türkiye on 12 September 1980 led to the prolongation of the process (Republic of Türkiye Directorate for EU Affairs, 2023). In this period, Türkiye's return to civilian democracy and the predominance of liberal economic policies, as well as Greece's accession to the EC, mobilised the Özal administration. Ankara applied for a full membership to the European Communities (EC) in 1987.²

The Europeanisation of the Cyprus issue since the 1990s and Greece's attempts to prevent Turkish membership of the Community indicates that the path to membership is not yet clear. Yet, the EC, wishing to develop ties with Türkiye, put the establishment of a customs union on its agenda. Greece vetoed the inclusion of Türkiye in the customs union. This problem was overcome by negotiating the membership application of the GASC with Türkiye (Karaca, Karacan and Yaşar, 2022, 55). The decision 1/95 of the Association Council dated 5 March 1995 led to the full establishment of a customs union between Türkiye and the EC on industrial products. With this decision, the 'final period' of the Türkiye-EC Association relationship was initiated and the customs union process between Türkiye and the EC started to operate as of 1 January 1996 (Republic of Türkiye Directorate for EU Affairs, 2023).³ Thus, Türkiye, contrary to many other countries, joined the CU without becoming a member of the EU (Özer, 2009, 93).

At the 1997 Luxembourg Summit, Turkish candidature was postponed due to the European Commission's assessment that Türkiye did not fulfil the political criteria. At this Summit, Cyprus was officially declared a candidate for EU membership. In the Presidential Conclusions of the Summit, the strengthening of Türkiye's ties with the EU was attributed to factors such as the establishment of satisfactory and stable relations between Greece and Türkiye and the settlement of disputes through the legal process, in particular through the International Court of Justice (European Parliament, 1998). In reaction to this decision, Ankara declared that it would increase its integration with the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) and did not attend to some of the EU meetings. Nevertheless, there has not been a break in

² Following the Treaty of Union (Treaty of Fusion) signed by the founding members in 1965, a single Council, Commission and Parliament were formed for the ECSC, EEC and EURATOM, their budgets were unified and the term European Communities (EC) began to be used and the European Union (EU) began to be called as of 1 January 1995.

³ Calis and Metkin (2017, 16) argue that the Customs Union was a way to keep Türkiye in Europe's orbit without admitting it to the EU, based on the non-realisation of Türkiye's EU membership.

Turkish foreign policy towards the EU. As a matter of fact, Türkiye's candidacy was declared by the EU in Helsinki in 1999. The Helsinki decision included Türkiye in the Community programmes, integrated Türkiye into the pre-accession financial instruments and initiated the process of harmonisation with EU rules and norms (Müftüler Baç, 2016, 62). However, it should be noted that following this period, Türkiye's road map has progressed in the form of "showing a date within a date" and membership is not guaranteed. In other words, unlike Central and Eastern European countries, Türkiye's EU membership process is not only about the ability to fulfil the required criteria (Müftüler Baç, 2016, 20). The realisation of membership requires that the EU's fear of losing Türkiye overrides the possibility of accepting Türkiye's membership. Considering that different integration proposals are frequently on the agenda, this possibility seems to be weak. As a matter of fact, Türkiye is the only country in the history of the EU that started negotiations but failed to obtain membership in such a long process. For example, the negotiations with Hungary, Poland, Slovenia and GASC, which started in 1998, concluded with membership in 2004. Similarly, Greece, which started negotiations in 1976, became a member of the Community in 1981 and Bulgaria, which started negotiations in 2002, became a member in 2007.

Despite the protracted process, the first years of the 21st century are the closest period for Türkiye to EU membership. In 2001, the first Accession Partnership Document (APD) was adopted, setting out priority fields for membership preparations, while Türkiye prepared its "National Programme for the Adoption of the EU Acquis" (NP) for 2001-2004. In the Commission's Strategy Paper on enlargement of 9 October 2002, it was stated that the Commission would propose a revised APD for Türkiye. In 2003, the new APD was adopted and priorities are categorised into two groups: short-term and medium-term. The short-term priorities cover the objectives that Türkiye expects to achieve in 2003 and 2004, while the medium-term priorities are those that are expected to take more than one year to complete, even though work has progressed considerably in the 2003-2004 period (State Planning Organisation General Directorate for Relations with the European Union, 2003).

A majority of the reforms and institutional arrangements adopted in Türkiye in the period between 2001 and 2004 were aimed at fulfilling the requirements of EU membership. The issues covered in the reports published since 1998 have

constituted the composition of the reform packages. In this context, constitutional reforms were adopted in 2001 and 2004, the death penalty was removed from the law, many restrictions on freedom of expression, association, religion and conscience were lifted, the state was given the obligation to ensure equality between women and men through a legal amendment, Court of Accounts audit on military expenditures was introduced, State Security Courts (SSCs) were closed, special attention was paid to combating the crime of torture, and cultural rights were expanded (Çalış and Metkin, 2017, 21). Such steps were effective on the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe's decision to lift the monitoring process on Türkiye on 22 June 2004. Moreover, Türkiye's progress in fulfilling the judgements of the ECtHR was welcomed by the Parliamentary Assembly (Özer, 2009, 98). At the Brussels Summit of 17 June 2004, the European Council, convinced that Ankara had sufficiently fulfilled the Copenhagen political criteria despite the blocking attempts of some members, decided to launch negotiations on 3 October 2005. Following the Brussels Summit, the issue of signing the Additional Protocol was back on the agenda and Türkiye signed the Additional Protocol to the Association Agreement on 29 July 2005. However, Ankara published a declaration stating that signing this protocol did not mean that it would recognise the GASC as the "Republic of Cyprus". As such, Türkiye did not open its ports and airports to traffic from the GASC (Taş, 2020, 46; Karaca, Karacan and Yaşar, 2022, 57).

On the positive recommendation of the Commission, the EU started accession negotiations with Türkiye on 3 October 2005. Following this period, negotiations with Ankara have continued with a number of difficulties. Accordingly, the European Commission increased the list of chapters to be negotiated from 31 to 35 for all candidates and adopted 'opening criteria' for the chapters. Moreover, the veto powers given to the member states enabled them to stop the opening of chapters even if the candidate country fulfils the *acquis*. For instance, the Commission proposed at the beginning of the process to open only Science and Research and Education and Culture while for all other candidates it was possible to open negotiations on more than one chapter at the same time. However, despite its compliance with EU legislation and the Commission's favourable assessment, the Education and Culture chapter could not be opened due to the French government's blocking of the opening of the chapter and the GASC's *de facto* veto of the opening of the chapter in September 2006 (Müftüler

Baç, 2016, 65-66). Until 2004, Greece and then the GASC attempted to prevent the membership of Türkiye to the EU. In this process, especially France and Germany have supported policies against Türkiye (Çalış and Metkin, 2017, 14). The 2005 declaration has continued to be a problem between Türkiye and the EU to date. On the recommendation of the Commission, the suspension of eight chapters was unanimously adopted at the Council summit in December 2006. With this decision, no chapter cannot be closed temporarily and any member state can request renegotiation on these chapters. In addition, Cyprus used its right of veto on six chapters, namely Education and Culture; Energy; Judiciary and Fundamental Rights; Justice, Freedom and Society; Foreign and Security Policy; and Freedom of Movement of Workers, and France was the second member state to block negotiations with Türkiye, vetoing five chapters (Müftüler Baç, 2016, 66-68).

Türkiye's level of harmonisation with the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy was 74% in the 2010 Report, while in the 2023 Report it is around 10% (European Commission, 2010; European Commission, 2023). Relations with the EU entered a breaking process after the Gezi Events in Istanbul in 2013, and the West did not enable the satisfactory support to the Turkish administration during the coup attempt in 2016. On 26 June 2018, the General Affairs Council concluded that Ankara was moving away from the EU, that the accession negotiations had effectively come to a standstill, and that it was not foreseeable to start the negotiations on the enlargement of the EU membership. Although the introduction to the Conclusions of the Council emphasised Türkiye's candidate status, this decision cast a shadow over the course of Turkish-EU relations. As stated in the subsequent reports, relations are effectively at a standstill. In the first half of 2019, the positive momentum in relations with the EU was replaced in the second half by increasing tensions and disputes on a number of issues, particularly in the Eastern Mediterranean.

At this point, it is critical to note that internal and external factors have played a role in Türkiye's EU integration, and the responsibility for the protracted process does not lie with one side. In a survey conducted in six countries in 2023, 51 per cent of respondents opposed Ankara's membership to the EU. According to the survey, Austria has the highest opposition to Turkish membership in the EU, while Polish citizens are the least (Euronews, 12 December 2023). Another

obstacle to membership is that, in case Ankara becomes a member of the EU, it will have the largest representation in the European Parliament as it is the most populous country in the Union (Grigoriadis, 2006, 156). At present, Germany is the most populous country in the Parliament. In this context, the speech of Joschka Fischer, who served as the German Foreign Minister between 1998-2005, "Let's find a formula that will put Türkiye to sleep" is quite interesting (Hürriyet, 2003). Similarly, former Czech President Milos Zeman criticised the EU's migration policy and wanted no economic support to be provided. Zeman opposes Turkish EU membership, as Türkiye is able to take care of asylum-seekers because of its same religion (NTV, 2015). This situation indicates that despite the successful conclusion of the negotiations, a number of countries may veto Turkish membership in the EU. Indeed, according to the second article of Türkiye's negotiation framework document adopted in 2005, "Türkiye's EU negotiation process is an open-ended process whose outcome cannot be guaranteed in advance. Taking into account all Copenhagen criteria, including the absorptive capacity of the Union, it should be ensured that if Türkiye is not in a position to fully assume the obligations of membership, it should be integrated into the European structures with the strongest possible ties" (Council of the European Union, 2005). This provision aims to maintain Ankara's relations with the EU through alternative methods in case of its failure to be included in the EU membership. In this context, it is known that former French Presidents Nicolas Sarkozy and Angela Merkel, who were against Türkiye's full membership, proposed a privileged partnership for Türkiye as an alternative to EU membership (Grigoriadis, 2006, 153-154).

Yet, it should be noted that there are some countries, especially in Eastern and Central Europe, which are not against Turkish membership. In particular, those in favour of liberal democratic values and cultural diversity, which do not base the EU identity on religious and ethnic elements, consider that Ankara's membership would strengthen the EU identity. Moreover, due to its strategic location, Türkiye's membership has the potential to strengthen the EU's position in the Middle East, Caucasus and Central Asia (Grigoriadis, 2006, 152-153). Besides these inferences, the recent rise of right-wing parties indicates that political dynamics in Europe will change. The European Parliament (EP) elections held in June 2024 show that anti-immigrant and Islamophobia in many

countries may become widespread and foreigners within the Union may face a number of challenges. Furthermore, considering the opposition of right-wing parties to Turkish membership (Yılmaz, 2007), the prospects for Türkiye-EU relations to gain momentum in the near future are further reduced. Meanwhile, the decline in Turkish expectations for EU membership has resulted in the development of political and economic relations with various countries as well as the ability to use its diplomacy skills more actively on global and regional issues in recent years. In this context, Türkiye's opening to Africa, becoming a dialogue partner in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and its membership in the SCO Energy Club, developing relations with Russia, humanitarian diplomacy activities during the Covid 19 pandemic, winning the war with its support for Azerbaijan in the Second Karabakh War, maintaining relations with Russia in the Russian-Ukrainian War, as well as the emphasis on Ukraine's territorial integrity and its impact on the continuation of grain trade can be given as examples.

Cyprus and Eastern Mediterranean in Turkish Foreign Policy

As the Eastern Mediterranean is located on the trade route connecting the West and the East, the region has a strategic importance (Yaycı, 2012, 3-4). The Ottoman Empire, which dominated almost all of the Mediterranean during the period of Suleiman the Magnificent, started to lose its influence in the region in the 19th century. Cyprus, which enables the opportunity to control the Middle East and the Eastern Mediterranean, is historically a part of Türkiye. The island was annexed by Britain in 1914 with the outbreak of the First World War, and British sovereignty was recognised on 24 July 1923. In the mid-20th century, when Britain's influence in the Middle East started to decline, the Greeks in Cyprus demanded enosis while the Turks supported the thesis of taksim. As the confusion increased, Britain, Türkiye and Greece held a series of negotiations. With the Zurich (11 February) and London (19 February) Agreements signed in 1959, a federal Republic of Cyprus was established. With the founding agreements, Türkiye, Greece and the UK became the guarantor states in Cyprus, while joint defence cooperation was established with the alliance agreement signed between the Republic of Cyprus, Türkiye and Greece (<http://www.mfa.gov.tr/kibris.tr.mfa>). Although the Zurich and London Agreements envisaged Cyprus as a bi-communal structure with political

equality, a permanent solution could not be achieved due to disagreements on judicial, administrative, law enforcement, etc. issues. Following the violent incidents in the country in 1963, a de facto separation situation emerged. In 1974, the coup d'état in Cyprus by the Greek military junta in violation of the Zurich and London Agreements required Türkiye to intervene in the island as a guarantor. The Turkish intervention in Cyprus had important consequences not only for Ankara but also for the Athens government. After the intervention, Greece's EU membership was supported by the West, while Turkish EU membership process was interrupted with the 1980 coup d'état.

In 1983, with the declaration of the independence of TRNC, Türkiye's Cyprus policy became clearer and the reactions from the international community towards Türkiye have increased. Similar to the 1964 Johnson letter that led to a break with the US, the Cyprus issue has become one of the disputes in EU-Turkish relations as well as Greece, especially since the 1990s. In 2004, the Greek Cypriot side voted 'no' to the Annan Plan, which advocated a bi-communal, bi-zonal, federal solution in which each community has equal political rights with the support of the UN. Despite the Greek Cypriot attitude in the referendum and the ongoing conflict on the island, the GASC joined the EU. GASC administration carried its problems with Türkiye to the Union and started to realise the policies aimed at preventing Türkiye's membership. This era was also a period in which hydrocarbons discoveries were made in the Eastern Mediterranean and various agreements were put on the agenda. Thus Cyprus, which has a strategic and political importance for the parties, has also increased its economic value. The attitudes of some leaders of the Cypriot communities have created an expectation that energy cooperation would be a catalyst for the settlement of disputes. However, no common ground has been reached in many areas such as the Cyprus issue, minority rights, delimitation of maritime and airspace zones, and energy exploration activities. Moreover, opening of the coastal area of Maraş (Varosha) to public visits by Ankara in 2020 was another issue criticised by the EU. The UN-led talks in Geneva on Cyprus yielded no results, and the proposal submitted by Northern Cyprus leader Ersin Tatar, which envisaged a two-state solution, was not accepted (BBC News Turkish, 2021). Thus, the tension with the EU has become more obvious with the this proposal supported by Türkiye.

The Eastern Mediterranean is composed of nine countries, including Cyprus, Egypt, Greece, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Palestine, Syria and Türkiye. In the 1990s, Greece, which experienced serious tensions with Ankara in the Aegean Sea has adopted an uncompromising attitude in the 2000s regarding the sharing of jurisdiction in the Eastern Mediterranean. The Athens government, which is a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), suggests a solution based on the general conditions of the convention. Accordingly, the factors such as the superiority of geography, proportionality, equality and the principle of non-closure are ignored. Greece conducts a sharing based on the centre line by taking Crete, Kashot, Choban, Rhodes, Meis line as a basis and tries to restrict Türkiye to the Gulf of Antalya in the Eastern Mediterranean (Yaycı, 2012, 19-23).

GASC, acting together with Greece, violates the rights of both Türkiye and Turkish Cypriots. In 2004, GASC adopted a law defining and regulating its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), which consists of thirteen sub-regions, five of which Ankara claims (Çubukcuoğlu, 2022). Furthermore, it signed EEZ delimitation agreements with Egypt in 2003, Lebanon in 2007 and Israel in 2010. The Greek Cypriot administration, encouraged by Israel's Tamar and Leviathan discoveries, accelerated hydrocarbon exploration activities along the southeastern borders close to the Israeli fields, and a number of deposits, especially Aphrodite, were discovered (Stergiou, 2019, 13). The discovered energy resources have led Greece and Israel, which have a distant history, to cooperate, and in a short time, the framework of cooperation was expanded with the inclusion of the GASC and Egypt (Grigoriadis, 2022, 805-806). Thus, with the increasing violence against Palestine, the Davos crisis and the Mavi Marmara attacks since 2009, Israel and Türkiye, the relations with Egypt started to weaken during the Arab Spring, were excluded from the cooperation equation in the Eastern Mediterranean. In this context, while trilateral leaders' summits have been held between Greece, GASC and Egypt since 2014, the first trilateral summit between Greece, GASC and Israel was held on 28 January 2016 (Ozan, 2022, 2273).

The beginning of Turkish activities in the Eastern Mediterranean can be based on the Continental Shelf Delimitation Agreement signed with the TRNC in 2011. For a long time, Ankara's activities were in the form of objecting to the steps taken by the GASC. At this point, while defending the legitimate rights of the TRNC on the one hand, the legal nature of the continental shelf agreements was targeted on the other.

Türkiye defends that by granting maritime jurisdiction areas beyond the territorial waters to the islands, the Turkish mainland is blocked and that this situation is unfair. In addition, the GASC-Egypt agreement is particularly objected as it violates Türkiye's continental shelf/MEB rights in the west of the island (Acer, 2021, 107-109). This dispute occasionally leads to an increase in tension in the region. For example, on 6 September 2016, the Permanent Representative of the GASC to the UN sent a letter addressed to the Secretary-General complaining about Ankara, stating that the Flash Royal vessel flying the flag of the Republic of Cyprus was harassed twice by a frigate of the Turkish Navy while conducting scientific research on behalf of the Republic of Cyprus (<https://documents.un.org/-/doc/undoc/gen/n16/279/31/pdf/n162793-1.pdf?token=iEV-1dYoXzisc-OKuAuy-&fe=true>). In a letter dated 29 September 2016 addressed to the Secretary-General by the Permanent Representative of Türkiye to the UN, it was stated that the territories beyond the western part of longitude 32°16'18" are de facto its natural area, as stated in verbal notes at various times in 2004 and 2013. Due to the violation of the Turkish continental shelf by the Flash Royal vessel on 25 August 2016, it was declared that, in accordance with the settled rules and principles of international law, Turkish military vessels in the region have the legitimate right to intervene in any scientific research activities carried out without consent <https://documents.un.org/doc/-/undoc/gen/n16/304/7-6/pdf/n1630476.-pdf?token=LguuL-FxaA1UBuX3xLl&fe=true>). In February 2018, Türkiye sent warships to the region to prevent the Italian energy company ENI from drilling off the coast of Cyprus. In October, a drillship (Fatih) was shipped to the Eastern Mediterranean accompanied by Turkish military vessels, and in November it closed the area surrounding the island of Meis to naval exercises (Bardakçı, 2023, 247). On the other hand, it should be noted that the TRNC and Türkiye have been calling for co-operation on the development of energy reserves in the region, especially during Mustafa Akıncı's presidency of the TRNC in 2015. On 13 June 2019, Akıncı sent a detailed proposal to the GASC, supported by Ankara, for the establishment of a joint committee consisting of an equal number of members from both communities and an independent observer under UN supervision, but no response was received (Çıraklı, 2021, 32).

In recent years, Türkiye has been trying to protect its legitimate rights in the region with more active and concrete steps. Ankara signed a Memorandum of

Understanding on the Delimitation of Maritime Jurisdiction in the Mediterranean with the Government of National Accord (GNA) of Libya on 27 November 2019. This agreement means that the EEZs of the islands of Crete, Kerpe, Kasos and Rhodes will be reduced to zero (Grigoriadis, 2022, 811). Besides, The Geçitkale Airport was opened for the use of UAVs and UCAVs (Savunma Gazetesi, 2024). Following the agreement, Greece has increased its strategic cooperation efforts with the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and France, which is uncomfortable with Türkiye's presence in the Eastern Mediterranean and its Libya policy; and GASC has signed a series of defence and security agreements with various regional actors such as the UAE, Jordan, Israel and Egypt (Alaranta, 2021, 4-6). Meanwhile, Ankara, which has the Barbaros Hayrettin Pasha seismic research vessel as well as the Fatih, Yavuz and Kanuni drillships, has expanded its energy exploration activities in the region after 2019 within the framework of its agreements with the TRNC and Libya. These actions are considered 'illegal' by the EU and Ankara is accused of increasing tensions in the region in the Türkiye Reports. Indeed, the General Affairs Council reported in 2018 that Türkiye is moving further away from the EU, and reports published since 2019 have stated that the accession negotiations have virtually come to a standstill. In addition, high-level political dialogue meetings and negotiations on the Comprehensive Aviation Agreement with Ankara were suspended due to the ongoing drilling activities in the Eastern Mediterranean, and the Council announced that the financial assistance expected from the EU for 2020 would be reduced (European Commission, 2020).

Finally, it is important to note that not only the discovery but also the transportation of energy requires the cooperation of several states. In this context, while energy supply is perceived as a matter of national security, it also constitutes a pillar of efforts to become an energy hub for some countries. There have been different options to ensure the transportation of energy in the region. The Israeli government initially planned -supported by the US- to build an undersea pipeline to European markets via Türkiye. In 2016, a consensus was reached on this economic option and the building of undersea oil and gas pipelines connecting Israel to Türkiye was put on the agenda. The Israeli gas would be connected to Turkish national network and integrated into the Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline (TANAP). However, Ankara's support to Hamas,

the US moving the Israeli embassy to Jerusalem in May 2018 and the killing of 62 people by Israeli soldiers in Gaza led to a breakdown in relations. Besides, the establishment of any undersea gas pipeline from Israel's Leviathan natural gas field to Türkiye would result in the EEZ declared by the GASC to pass through a point where the TRNC has de facto control. This would undoubtedly mean the deterioration of the GASC-Israel relations. Although theoretically, there is also an option to lay a pipeline from Israel to Türkiye bypassing Cyprus through Lebanese waters, this possibility does not seem realistic given the relations between Israel and Lebanon (Stergiou, 2019, 15-17).

The most popular option by the states in the region is the East Mediterranean Pipeline Project (EastMed). It is expected that the pipeline will start from the natural gas fields off the coast of Israel and continue through the islands of Cyprus and Crete to the Peloponnesian peninsula of Greece, ending in Oradea, Italy. Of the 1,900 kilometres of pipeline, 1,300 kilometres (808 miles) are planned to run underwater. In December 2017, the Energy Ministers of Italy, Greece, Cyprus and Israel signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU), which provides a framework for political cooperation if the project is deemed feasible (Tsardanidis, 2019, 81). The line, which is expected to transport between 10 and 16 billion cubic metres of gas annually, is supported by Europe. Moreover, in 2019, the US Congress, whose Eastern Mediterranean policy is unfavourable to Türkiye, approved the Eastern Mediterranean Security and Energy Partnership Act, allowing the lifting of the arms embargo imposed since 1987 and providing security assistance to the GASC and Greece (Talbot, 2020, 16-17).

The most discussed issue in the EastMed project is the uneconomical character of the pipeline. Therefore, it is estimated that transporting the gas would increase the price per heat unit by 3-4 USD. The impact of the East Mediterranean pipeline on the EU's energy security is also questionable. The annual gas deliveries of the proposed pipeline would account for approximately 4% of the total European market demand (Stergiou, 2019, 19). However, with the EastMed project on the agenda, steps to isolate Türkiye from the region have gained momentum. Greece, Israel, Egypt and the GASC have crowned their cooperation with the establishment of the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum, a multilateral initiative that was elevated to the status of an international organisation in March 2021 (Grigoriadis, 2022, 805-806). Greece concluded agreements with Egypt and Italy. It is noteworthy that

in these agreements, some islands, islets and reefs were not recognised as continental shelves as demanded by Ankara (Grigoriadis, 2022, 811). The fragile relationship with the mentioned countries leads to Türkiye's exclusion from the Eastern Mediterranean equation and the emergence of a region with high economic returns as a threat to national security.

Cyprus and the Eastern Mediterranean Dispute in the European Commission Reports on Türkiye

The European Commission has been publishing annual reports since 1998, assessing the progress made by candidate countries in harmonising with the Copenhagen criteria. While these reports were initially published as "Progress Report", after 2014 reports started to be prepared with the name of the country concerned (e.g. Türkiye Report).⁴ In the Regular Reports on Türkiye's Progress towards Accession published between 1998 and 2005, the Commission wants the Türkiye, as guarantor of the Turkish Cypriot community, to use its special relationship to promote a just and equitable settlement of the Cyprus problem in accordance with the relevant UN resolutions, which are essentially based on the establishment of a bi-zonal and bi-communal federation. Reports were indicated that Türkiye's position on the Cyprus issue is incompatible with UN resolutions and the attitude of the European Union and has a negative impact on the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. Since 2000, the reports have also included information on court cases against Türkiye and complaints concerning Greek Cypriot property in the northern part of the island (The well known is the Loizidou case, for which Türkiye agreed to pay compensation in 2003). Restrictions in maritime transport due to the non-recognition of the GASC by Türkiye is one of the major topics of the Reports. The reports clearly indicate that the solution of the Cyprus issue is the most crucial item on the agenda of Türkiye's ongoing accession negotiations with the EU.

In the 2005 and onwards reports, the topics related to Cyprus and the Eastern Mediterranean can be categorised under the following headings:

⁴ For Türkiye, reports published between 1998 and 2005 were named as Regular Reports. Additionally, there was no report published in 2017.

Cyprus, Negotiations and Relations with the EU

The reports include attempts and developments towards the solution of the Cyprus issue and review Türkiye's stance. Türkiye's attempts to solution the dispute in the initial years were appreciated. However, as time passed, the failure of the parties to meet at a common point was reflected in the reports. The talks seem to have become deadlocked, especially in recent years. For example, The Conferences on Cyprus were held in Geneva in January 2017 and in Crans-Montana in July 2017, but no results were obtained (European Commission, 2018).

The dramatic increase in illegal migration following the Syrian civil war has reshaped the EU's policy towards Türkiye. Yet, the Cyprus issue has remained a key factor in EU-Türkiye relations. During the 2020 reporting period, the high-level UN official holding consultations on behalf of the UN Secretary-General continued to meet with the parties. In addition, in November 2019, in Berlin, the UN Secretary-General held informal meetings with the leaders of the two communities in Cyprus, where both leaders reaffirmed their commitment and determination to a solution based on a bi-communal and bi-zonal federation with political equality between the two communities, as set out in UN Security Council resolutions. In this report, it was also announced that on 1 October 2020, the European Council agreed to launch the EU-Türkiye positive political agenda, in line with the EU-Türkiye Statement of 18 March 2016, with particular emphasis on updating the Customs Union and continuing cooperation on trade facilitation, humanitarian contact, high-level dialogue and migration, provided that constructive efforts to halt illegal activities against Greece and Cyprus are maintained (European Commission, 2020). However, the process did not continue in 2021. Following the change of leadership in the Turkish Cypriot community in December 2020, the senior UN official responsible for Cyprus held a series of meetings with representatives of the two communities in Cyprus. For the first time in almost four years, new informal talks on the future of the island of Cyprus between the two Cypriot communities and the island's three Guarantor Powers, the UK, Türkiye and Greece, took place in Geneva in April 2021. The informal meeting marked the resumption of formal negotiations but did not pave the way for its initiation (European Commission, 2021).

According to the 2022 report, the Greek Prime Minister and the Turkish President met in Istanbul on 13 March 2022 and agreed to set a positive agenda. However, as of 23 May, the Turkish President refused to meet with the Greek Prime Minister and stated that the Greece-Türkiye High Level Cooperation Council meeting scheduled for autumn 2022 would not be held. The 2022 report emphasised that, in contrast to the two-state solution option defended by Ankara, the EU remains fully committed to a comprehensive settlement of the Cyprus issue on the basis of a bi-communal, bi-zonal federation based on political equality. Due to the heavy and repeated violations of Greek airspace in the Aegean by Turkish warplanes and drones and Türkiye's threatening statements regarding the sovereignty of the Greek islands, relations between the two countries were suspended as of April 2022 (European Commission, 2022).

In 2023, earthquakes in Türkiye decreased the tensions in Türkiye-Greece relations. Yet, Türkiye's activities in the area of Varosha have persisted to be a major dispute. The EU called for full compliance with UNSC Resolutions on Varosha (in particular Resolutions 550, 789 and 1251). Furthermore, in the 2023 Report, the admission of the TRNC as an observer member of the Organisation of Turkic States in November 2022 is considered as a violation of the principle of territorial integrity and the UN Charter. It was also emphasised that Türkiye's military exercises in the maritime zones of Cyprus and violations by Turkish unmanned aerial vehicles in the Nicosia flight information region and the national airspace of the Republic of Cyprus continued. According to the report the militarisation of the occupied territory continued with the development of the military drone base in Geçitkale and the naval base in the Iskele Strait. The UN Security Council (UNSC) decision to extend the mandate of the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) is criticised by Türkiye. In August 2023, following unauthorised construction work by the Turkish Cypriot side in the UN buffer zone near the village of Pyla/Pile, Türkiye rejected a UN Security Council statement condemning the violation of the status quo, which led to increased tensions. These tensions included an attack on UN Peacekeepers by Turkish Cypriot personnel on 18 August 2023, which was strongly condemned by the EU. In October 2023, the UN brokered a settlement agreement between the two sides regarding the Pyla/Pile area, which was welcomed by Türkiye and the EU. However, these developments continued to

undermine the prospects for the resumption of negotiations and a comprehensive settlement of the Cyprus issue.

The reports are criticised Türkiye's blocking of the international recognition of Cyprus. In this context Türkiye is vetod against Cyprus to the Wassenaar Convention on Export Controls on Conventional Arms and Dual-Use Material and Technology, Cyprus' membership of certain international organisations such as the OECD. Similarly, Ankara blocked the Republic of Cyprus to join the United Nations Conference on Disarmament as an observer member in 2020 and to participate in the Conference on Disarmament in 2021 (European commission, 2021; 2022). According to 2023 Report, regarding the establishment of a new united Cyprus plan for the registration of frequencies below 700 MHz under the Geneva 06 International Telecommunication Union (ITU) plan, Cyprus still faces Turkish objection at the ITU.

EU wants Ankara to lift all restrictions on Cyprus. According to all reports after 2005 (Except for the 2017 Report), Türkiye has not fulfilled its obligation to fully and without discrimination implement the Additional Protocol to the Association Agreement and has not removed all obstacles to the free movement of goods, including restrictions on direct transport links with Cyprus. The non-recognition of the GASC has an impact on transport, communication and trade as well as banking systems. Accordingly, it was reported in 2011 that transactions between banks established in Cyprus and banks established in Türkiye are blocked, that there has been no progress in payment systems and that Türkiye's overall alignment with the EU *acquis* is not yet complete (European Commission, 2011).

The Cyprus issue negatively affects Türkiye's relations with the EU. As a known example, in 2012, GASC became the EU Term Presidency, and Türkiye decided to freeze its relations with the EU during this presidency. Türkiye declared that it would not attend meetings and instructed all Turkish public officials to abstain from contacts and meetings with the GASC Presidency of the Council of the EU. During this period, Türkiye did not attend any declaration or statement of the EU within the framework of international organisations. For example, it did not enable support to the Union for the Mediterranean Ministerial Meeting (European Commission, 2013).

Transport Policy

Since 2005, all the reports have criticised Türkiye's refusal to allow vessels flying the flag of the Republic of Cyprus and whose last port of call was Cyprus to use its ports. It is emphasised that this situation constitutes an obstacle to the free movement of goods and trade and violates the Customs Union Agreement. Similarly, according to the Reports, there is no progress on the use of Turkish national airspace by Cyprus Airlines and other Cypriot transport companies, nor on restrictions on communication between the Turkish and Cypriot civil aviation authorities. GASC is a member of the EU has made Türkiye's membership process more fragile. According to the 2007 report (to be repeated in subsequent reports), as long as restrictions on the free movement of goods carried by vessels and aircraft flying the Cypriot flag or whose last port of call is in Cyprus remain in place, Türkiye will not be in a position to fully implement the *acquis* on the 'Free Movement of Goods', 'Right of establishment and freedom to provide services', 'Financial Services', 'Agriculture and Rural Development', 'Fishing', 'Transport Policy', 'Customs Union' and 'Foreign Affairs' chapters (European Commission). In addition, It is also frequently stated that the lack of communication between the air control centres in Türkiye and the air control centres of the Republic of Cyprus seriously endangers air safety in the Nicosia Flight Information Line (FIR). Finally, regarding the 2022 report, it is noted that Ercan Airport, which is not recognised by the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO), was designated as Turkey's domestic airport in June (European Commission, 2022).

Cases

The Immovable Property Commission (IPC) was set up under the Immovable Property Law (No. 67/2005). The purpose of this mechanism was to establish an effective domestic remedy for claims relating to abandoned properties in Northern Cyprus (<https://tamk.gov.ct.tr/tr-tr/>). The 2007 report found that there were ongoing cases but that the new compensation mechanism essentially fulfilled the Court's requirements. In the 2008 Report, while some of the decisions of the Turkish Cypriot Immovable Property Commission are considered positive, it was stated that Ankara has not yet fully implemented the ECtHR judgements. Developments regarding property issues since 2011 have been based on concrete data. In this

context, in 2011 Report, around 1500 applications have been made to the Immovable Property Commission by Greek Cypriot property owners and it has been reported that approximately 200 applications have been finalised so far, mostly through peaceful settlement (European Commission, 2011).

By 2013, the Reports have also included the amount of compensation paid by Türkiye. In this context, according to the 2013 Report, Greek Cypriot property owners submitted 1465 applications to the Immovable Property Commission in the period 1 October 2012-31 August 2013 and 5,270 applications in total since 2010. As of September 2013, approximately 412 applications had been concluded, mostly by amicable settlement, and the Immovable Property Commission had paid compensation of 133,014,051 pounds (154,662,629 euros). Although Türkiye's attitude has been criticised in some cases, such as Xenides-Arestis and Türkiye, Demades and Türkiye, Varnava and Others and Türkiye, it is observed that the number of concluded disputes has increased through the years. According to the Commission Report in 2022, by April, 7,111 applications had been submitted to the Immovable Property Commission in the northern part of Cyprus. Of these applications, 1,324 were resolved through conciliation and 34 through court proceedings. To date, the Immovable Property Commission has paid compensation to applicants totalling approximately €392 million (Europe Commission, 2022).

Energy Activities in the Eastern Mediterranean

Since 2004, the GASC, with the power it has gained from its EU membership, has started to establish energy cooperation in the Eastern Mediterranean, ignoring the rights of Türkiye and TRNC. However, Ankara's attempts to prevent these initiatives and its counter actions are criticised in the EU Reports. In this context in the 2007 Report Türkiye protested against the EEZ delimitation agreement concluded by the Republic of Cyprus with Lebanon for oil extraction, arguing that it was incompatible with the provisions of the 1960 Treaty of Guarantee and the principles of international law on maritime boundaries. On similar grounds, the defence cooperation agreement between France and the Republic of Cyprus was also protested. Moreover, according to the 2009 Report, the Turkish navy on several occasions intercepted civilian vessels exploring for oil for the GASC.

According to the 2012 report, following the announcement by the GASC that it would launch a second round of the offshore exploration licences, Türkiye's statements opposing the drilling activities carried out by the GASC and threatening to retaliate against the oil companies that would participate in the Greek Cypriot exploration activities continued. On the other hand, a "Continental Shelf Delimitation Agreement" was signed between Türkiye and the representatives of the Turkish Cypriot Community and TPAO supported offshore exploratory drilling near Famagusta.

The reports criticise Türkiye's statements and actions threatening the GASC's right to explore hydrocarbons in the EEZ. In this context, in February 2018, Türkiye carried out repeated manoeuvres with its navy vessels, prevented the drilling activities of the vessel belonging to the Italian company ENI, which would operate on behalf of the GASC, and caused the planned drilling activities to be interrupted (European Commission, 2018). The 2018 report underlines that the EU Summit in March 2018 strongly condemned Türkiye's continued unlawful actions in the Aegean Sea and the Eastern Mediterranean and reminded Türkiye of its obligations to respect international law, maintain good neighbourly relations and normalise relations with all EU Member States (European Commission, 2018).

The 2019 Türkiye Report started to criticise Türkiye's discourse on the Eastern Mediterranean as well as its energy exploration activities. In this period, Türkiye has transformed from a country that reacts to the developments in the region to a country that determines the dynamics in the region. In this context, the report states that in addition to Türkiye's threatening discourse, Türkiye's sending a drilling platform to the EEZ of the GASC in May 2019, accompanied by warships, further increased tensions. In the report, it is stated that Türkiye started oil and natural gas exploration activities in the Eastern Mediterranean at the end of 2018, carried out seismic exploration activities in the EEZ of the GASC and has a threatening attitude that these activities will continue (European Commission, 2019). Therefore, Türkiye was reminded of its obligation to respect international law and good neighbourly relations and called on Türkiye to respect the rights of the GASC to explore and exploit its natural resources in accordance with EU and international law.

The 2020 Report, the Report with the highest number of mentions of Cyprus, criticises Türkiye for its illegal actions and provocative statements threatening the right of the Republic of Cyprus to exploit hydrocarbon resources in its EEZ and notes the escalation of tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean. Türkiye reportedly sent two drillships and two seismic survey vessels into the EEZ of the Republic of Cyprus and the territorial waters of the Republic of Cyprus, including areas licensed by the Government of Cyprus to European oil and gas companies. The accompaniment of the Turkish Armed Forces to the drilling and seismic survey vessels during the operation poses a significant threat to the security of the region, while Türkiye has also raised the issue of the status of the closed city of Varosha. The report also includes the Memorandum of Understanding on Delimitation of Jurisdiction in the Mediterranean Sea signed in 2019 between the Government of the Republic of Türkiye and the Government of National Accord of the Libyan State. In this context, the EU Summit in December 2019 confirmed solidarity with Greece and Cyprus in the face of Türkiye's activities in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Aegean Sea and emphasised that the Memorandum violates the sovereign rights of third states, is incompatible with the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea and cannot have legal consequences for third states. It was stated that the actions taken by Türkiye were illegal and it was emphasised that this would have negative effects on Türkiye-EU relations. The Summit also urged Türkiye to accept Cyprus' call for dialogue to resolve all maritime disputes between Türkiye and Cyprus. In this period, Cyprus reported a significant increase in the number of military exercises conducted by Türkiye in its EEZ. The report states that due to Türkiye's unauthorised drilling activities in the Eastern Mediterranean, in July 2019 the Council decided to suspend negotiations on the Comprehensive Air Transport Agreement with Türkiye and the EU-Türkiye Association Council and other EU-Türkiye High Level Dialogue meetings for a while, to support the Commission's proposal to reduce pre-accession assistance to Türkiye for 2020 and to call on the European Investment Bank to review its lending activities to Türkiye, in particular state-backed lending. In November 2019, the EU adopted a framework of targeted measures against Türkiye and, in February 2020, decided to add two individuals to the sanctions list under this sanctions framework.

The report states that Türkiye has declared that it will not agree to negotiate with the Republic of Cyprus on the delimitation of maritime jurisdiction in the Eastern Mediterranean as it does not recognise the Republic of Cyprus. Yet, in July 2019, Türkiye supported the proposal of the leader of the Turkish Cypriot community to the President of the Republic of Cyprus for cooperation on the exploration and exploitation of hydrocarbon resources in Cyprus. In addition, Türkiye announced its readiness to discuss the issue of maritime delimitation with other parties. During the reporting period, Greece continued to object to Türkiye's launch of an offshore oil and gas exploration tender in the area including part of the continental shelf of the island of Meis. Aiming to underline its territorial claims, in August Türkiye unilaterally deployed a research vessel and a military ship on the continental shelf off the island of Kastellorizo, which will last until 12 September 2020. In addition, in May 2020, the Turkish Petroleum Corporation applied to the Turkish Government for authorisation to carry out exploration and drilling activities south and south-east of the four Greek islands. During the reporting period, Greece and Cyprus continued to object to Türkiye's activities in the region.

The 2021 report noted a deterioration of relations with the EU until December 2020, due to Türkiye's actions in the Eastern Mediterranean that directly challenged the maritime rights of the Republic of Cyprus. According to the report, Türkiye has halted illegal hydrocarbon exploration activities in the maritime jurisdictions of Greece and Cyprus, thus reducing tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean at the beginning of 2021. However, in early October, Turkish warships prevented the vessel Nautical Geo from conducting exploration in the EEZ of Cyprus and Türkiye issued a NAVTEX to carry out seismic surveys covering some areas in the EEZ of Cyprus. In addition, actions to change the status of closed Varosha continued with unacceptable and unilateral decisions contradicting United Nations Security Council Resolutions 550 (1984) and 789 (1992). The EU strongly condemned these efforts and called for the immediate reversal of all steps taken in relation to Varosha.

The 2022 Türkiye Report states that during the reporting period, Türkiye did not conduct any drilling activities in the Eastern Mediterranean without authorisation but Turkish warships increased tensions by obstructing survey activities in Cypriot EEZ in October 2021 and January 2022. Although there has been a progress in Türkiye-EU relations since December 2020 due to the détente in the Eastern

Mediterranean, the tensions in the Aegean resumed in April 2022. Under the heading of regional cooperation, it is stated that the tensions in the Aegean Sea and the Eastern Mediterranean do not create an environment conducive to good neighborly relations and weaken regional stability and security. In the Report, due to Türkiye's provocative actions in the Eastern Mediterranean, it was stated that the Council conclusions adopted in July 2019 remain valid. Accordingly, the Council;

- Suspended negotiations on the Comprehensive Air Transport Agreement with Türkiye,
- The EU-Türkiye Association Council as well as other EU-Türkiye High Level Dialogue meetings were suspended for the time being,
- The Commission's proposal to reduce pre-accession assistance to Türkiye for 2020 was supported
- The European Investment Bank was invited to review its lending activities to Türkiye, in particular state-sponsored lending.

Under this sanctions framework, two Turkish individuals are still continues to be on the sanctions list. In addition, a Turkish shipping company, Libyan arms sanctions list in violation of the embargo. According to the report, maintaining a stable and secure environment in the Eastern Mediterranean and developing a co-operative and mutually beneficial relationship with Türkiye is in the EU's strategic interest. According to the report, Türkiye continued its military exercises in the maritime zones of Cyprus and its actions to further reopen the fenced-off town of Varosha. Furthermore, the militarisation of the occupied territory continued with the development of the military drone base in Geçitkale and the naval base in the Iskele Strait. It is stated that Türkiye's harassment of Cypriot fishing vessels also continued. During the reporting period, Bilal Aga Masjid, Pertev Pasha Tomb and the Cyprus National Garden were opened following renovation works in fenced-off area of Varosha. New barriers and border checkpoints were established and the Turkish army took a defensive position in the area. Furthermore, additional restrictions were imposed on the activities of the United Nations Peacekeeping Mission in Cyprus (UNFICYP) and the ability of UNFICYP to fulfil its mandate in accordance with its mandate was challenged. The report stated that these developments are an obstruction to the start of negotiations and the comprehensive settlement of the Cyprus issue. In the report, Türkiye is called upon to immediately reverse the unilateral actions on Varosha announced on 20 July 2021 and all steps

taken since October 2020 that contradict the relevant UN Security Council Resolutions.

The 2023 report emphasises that Türkiye has not carried out unauthorised drilling activities in the areas covering the EEZ of Cyprus, although it has issued numerous navigation notices (NAVTEX) to carry out seismic surveys and scientific research activities. According to the report, the restrictive measures on Türkiye have been extended for a further year until November 12, 2023.

Others issues

One of the key issues emphasised in the report is the developments in Türkiye's domestic politics. Accordingly, especially in the first reports, the impact of the Turkish military forces on politics was stressed. In 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009 Reports notes the increasing political influence of the Turkish Armed Forces and emphasises that senior members have increased public statements on domestic and foreign policy issues, including Cyprus, secularism and Kurdish issues. Through the reforms carried out along the way, the control of the Turkish military forces in the government has been limited.

The reports also include some discriminatory procedures towards the GASC. According to the 2013 Report, as regards capital movements and payments, the legal framework for the acquisition of real estate by foreigners is not in line with Article 63 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU, with citizens of Greece, Bulgaria and Cyprus subject to some specific restrictions (European Commission, 2013; 2014). The 2014 Report analysed Türkiye's new e-visa policy and stated that the system leads to de facto discrimination by directing applicants from the Greek Administration of Southern Cyprus to the "Greek Administration of Southern Cyprus" country option, which may also restrict their mobility (European Commission, 2014; 2015). According to the 2016 report, in May Türkiye issued a Council of Ministers Decree stating that all EU citizens can enter Türkiye visa-free from the date of the lifting of the visa requirement for Turkish citizens, thus ending the discriminatory visa regime between EU countries. However, the report state that the e-visa system remains a discriminatory visa regime for 11 Member States, including the GASC (European Commission 2018; 2021; 2022; 2023).

CONCLUSION

Throughout the years since the establishment of legal relations in 1963, Turkey has identified EU membership as an essential aim of its foreign policy. In 2004, the SCGA's accession to the EU had the greatest impact on Turkey's membership process. This membership, which was decisive in Europeanising the Cyprus dispute and making the EU a party to the Eastern Mediterranean issue, caused the surrounding of Ankara. Indeed, even though negotiations were launched in 2005, Turkey's harmonisation process with the EU criteria has remained in the shadow of the Cyprus issue.

On the other hand, it is clear that in the last decade, Turkish foreign policy has been struggling with the difficulties of harmonisation with EU in general. One of these problems, the Eastern Mediterranean dispute, is fundamentally linked to the Cyprus issue. The GASC's hydrocarbon exploration activities in the region, ignoring the rights of Turkish Cypriots, and Greece's efforts to restrict Türkiye to the Gulf of Antalya are supported by the EU. Turkey's active role in the Eastern Mediterranean since 2019 has led to a more negative outlook in relations with both the two countries and EU. In this regard, Turkey is criticised in almost all reports.

Cyprus and the Eastern Mediterranean issues are covered in the EU Reports by ignoring Turkey's legitimate rights and its actions to ensure the defence of its national security are regarded as "illegal". The EU, which is aware that the current status quo is in favour of the SCGA, is also acting biased on Cyprus and the interests of Turkish Cypriots are overlooked. As Turkey is a guarantor state in Cyprus and the Eastern Mediterranean is a part of Turkey's sovereign territory, it is necessary to protect its legitimate rights. At this point, it is possible for Turkey to gain support by establishing bilateral co-operation. Especially in the Eastern Mediterranean, it will be crucial to keep political disputes out of the process and improve policies that demonstrate economic interests.

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