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Transatlantic Energy Cooperation; Past, Present, and Future and the place of Turkey in this cooperation

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Transatlantic cooperation on energy first started when the US supported six European countries to establish European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC 1951) and the European Atomic Energy Community and EURATOM (1957), following energy crisis of 1951 and 1956. When the debate on the energy security emerged at the international level in the aftermath of 1973 oil crisis, the transatlantic partners; US, some European states, and Turkey have developed a new strategies to avoid energy dependency on Middle East oil to eliminate negative impacts of future oil crisis by establishing International Energy Agency (IEA). With the end of Cold War and disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991, the vast hydrocarbon reserves located in the Caspian region made the newly established states of the region new energy suppliers of European countries and Turkey. The US supported these multiple pipelines approaches that made Ankara an important strategic partner of transatlantic energy projects since 1990s.

In 2000s, concerns about energy dependency were raised by the EU and underlined in European Security Strategy of 2003. Five years later in the report on the implementation of European Security Strategy, “energy security” was described as one of the key threats to the Union. Not only Russo-Georgian War of 2008 but also gas fight between Russia and Ukraine in 2006 and 2009 ended up with gas disruption from Russia to Ukraine revealed how diversification of energy sources is important to avoid energy dependency for the EU.



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Turkey, like the EU, needs to diversify its energy imports to enhance its energy security. Turkey is key partner for Europe's energy security and diversification. In 2000s, South Caucasus pipelines received the US bipartisan support strengthening Turkey's position in the transatlantic energy cooperation as a bridge between Caspian and Middle Eastern region with vast hydrocarbon resources.

In 2010, shale revolution transformed production in the US oil and gas industry making the US one of the major LNG exporter in the world. The lower price of US LNG contributed to the increase of US shares and of the energy diversification efforts for both the EU and Turkey. Access to LNG and well-integrated internal pipeline network remains essential to European energy security but its role will evolve by the middle of the century to become a "complement" to electricity generation from renewables. Renewable energy represents a huge opportunity for transatlantic partners to develop their energy cooperation.

Despite these emerging areas for further cooperation on energy between the transatlantic partners, there are contentious issues such as Nordstream 2 and the US' two Acts allowing the US administration to impose sanctions to its allies. Despite their positive aim, these Acts that prioritize punitive actions may hinder future cooperation between the US and its European allies.

In addition to the US LNG export, potential of renewables to develop joint projects and new Acts I mentioned briefly, support for new initiatives and partnerships on energy seems to emerge as a part of new transatlantic energy cooperation. Transatlantic energy cooperation today is proactively investing in EU energy infrastructure and connectivity projects such as Three Seas Initiative.



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Another new initiative on energy cooperation that transatlantic partners agreed on in the Eastern Mediterranean is Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum (East Med Gas Forum- EMGF) established by seven Mediterranean countries including Egypt, Italy, Greek Cypriot Administration, Jordan, Greece, Palestine and Israel but excluding Turkey and Lebanon. This Forum aims to create a regional gas market to benefit member states by ensuring supply and demand of its members, optimizing resource development, offering competitive prices and improving trade relations. All these targets sound good, but it is still questionable whether the Forum fulfils its economic potential and ambition in the absence of Turkey and Lebanon , under the shadow of continuing disputable maritime boundary issues and without the settlement of Cypriot conflict.

Conflict resolution, absent in transatlantic energy cooperation, should become an integral part of transatlantic cooperation on energy. Not so long ago, the US administration developed an energy diplomacy and energy policy based on the understanding that “energy can and should serve as the tool for cooperation, for stability, security and prosperity.” With this policy, Washington envisioned increased transportation, increased investment and “peace pipelines” in the Eastern Mediterranean that could serve as regional peace dividends in the region. Recent months, an important step has been taken by the US to find a solution to maritime border dispute between Israel and Lebanon. The US proposed to act as mediator between conflicting parties. Similar mediation efforts, support for peace talks, and prevention of steps that might turn a frozen conflict into real one, is vital for the energy security of the region and for the achieving EU’s aim to turn the Mediterranean basin into an area of peace, stability, and prosperity.

Energy should be an important field of cooperation not cause of risk. Securing critical infrastructure is vital and more likely if there is a stability in the region. Gas has the potential to serve as a catalyst for peace in the Eastern Mediterranean if global and regional powers give it a



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chance. This was actually not an impossible scenario for the region because, 70 years ago, Europe managed to build peace through an initial cooperation in its coal and steel sectors after the Second World War. This was a choice consciously made by the European leaders of the time to bring peace and stability, and to reduce the possibility of future conflicts and wars in Europe.

Such platforms that enable countries to enter dialogue and exchange ideas are crucial to find remedies to the challenges faced in the Eastern Mediterranean. Without reaching a compromise or agreement through regional cooperation by putting aside political disputes, extracting gas in the region will be either too costly, unprofitable, or risky.