

Economic Interdependence and Conflict in Eastern Mediterranean: The Case of the Maritime Conflict Between Türkiye and Greece

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Abstract: In the Eastern Mediterranean, there are maritime territorial disputes between different states, particularly Türkiye and Greece. This study examines the impact of economic interdependence on the ongoing disputes in the Eastern Mediterranean, focusing on the relationship between these disputes and economic interdependence and hypothesizing that economic interdependence creates a security dilemma between states. This hypothesis is tested through the dispute between Türkiye and Greece in the Eastern Mediterranean. Türkiye and Greece, which have a long history of disputes in the region, have important themes of competition on regional and global grounds, particularly maritime jurisdictions. The study focuses on the relationship between these themes of competition and economic interdependence and reveals the security dilemma that this interdependence creates between the two states. Copeland's trade expectations model is used to analyze this relationship. The model focuses on the impact of trade and economic interdependence on states and discusses the conflict-peace possibilities that may arise from this impact. However, this study takes the security dilemma out of the military realm and moves it to the economic realm, supporting Copeland's model by arguing that economic interdependence can also create a security dilemma situation. In the study, the periods of crisis in Türkiye and Greece were analyzed together with their defense expenditures to reveal their perceptions of "suspicion" and "concern". In the end, it was concluded that Türkiye has more security concerns than

competition on regional and global grounds, particularly maritime jurisdictions. The study focuses on the relationship between these themes of competition and economic interdependence and reveals the security dilemma that this interdependence creates between the two states. Copeland's trade expectations model is used to analyze this relationship. The model focuses on the impact of trade and economic interdependence on states and discusses the conflict-peace possibilities that may arise from this impact. However, this study takes the security dilemma out of the military realm and moves it to the economic realm, supporting Copeland's model by arguing that economic interdependence can also create a security dilemma situation. In the study, the periods of crisis in Türkiye and Greece were analyzed together with their defense expenditures to reveal their perceptions of "suspicion" and "concern". In the end, it was concluded that Türkiye has more security concerns than

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Greece. When this situation is analyzed through the security of identity, it is seen that ontological insecurity emerges.

Keywords: Economic interdependence, Türkiye, Greece, Security Dilemma, Eastern Mediterranean.

Introduction

For many years, the Eastern Mediterranean region has been characterized by the problems and disagreements of the countries in the region and has often been characterized by conflict and crisis. However, this situation has started to change recently, and energy security has become the main motivation here. In this regard, the new energy resources discovered off the coast of Israel in 2010 and afterwards have had a great impact.

One of the most important disputes in the region for many years has been between Türkiye and Greece, which is also the subject of this study. The main topics related to this dispute, which can be traced back to the World War I and World War II periods, are the population exchange, the determination of territorial waters in the Aegean Sea and the Cyprus problem. Although the problem regarding population exchange has been resolved, the problem regarding the rights of the countries in the Aegean Sea and the political status of Cyprus still persists. There are many studies in the literature on Turkish-Greek relations (Ak, 2018; Alibabalu, 2022; Gök & Mavruk, 2022; Heraclides, 2011; Küçük, 2021). Many of them address problems related to the Cyprus issue (Stergiou, 2019; Axt, 2021; Grigoriadis, 2022; Günay, 2007; Günar, 2020; Dalay, 2021) and some of them also address territorial disputes (Çelikkol & Karabel, 2017; Tziarras, 2019; Ellinas, 2022; Şihmantepe, 2013). However, most of the recent studies have been shaped around the refugee problem and the Eastern Mediterranean. In these studies, which are especially based on European security and energy security, Turkish-Greek relations have been constructed to analyze drilling activities and military exercises in the Aegean Sea and the Mediterranean. Unlike all these studies, this study analyzes the maritime conflict between Türkiye and Greece in the Eastern Mediterranean through the economic interdependence theory. While economic interdependence normally causes bilateral relations to evolve into cooperation, this study tests the hypothesis that it increases the likelihood of war by causing a security dilemma.

Türkiye and Greece have important themes of competition on regional and global grounds, particularly maritime jurisdictions. The study focuses on the relationship between these rivalry themes and economic interdependence and reveals the security dilemma created by this interdependence between the two states. In this study, firstly, economic interdependence is discussed as a conceptual framework and how it creates

a security dilemma is explained. Discussing the conflict-peace possibilities of economic interdependence on Türkiye–Greece relations, this study tests the concept of security dilemma in the economic field by removing it from the military field. Copeland’s trade expectations model is used to analyze this relationship. Secondly, the themes of economic interdependence in the Eastern Mediterranean are discussed. In particular, how economic interdependence emerged in the region, the discovery of energy resources in the region and the policies of the countries in the region after the discovery of these new resources are explained. Greece, Türkiye, and the island of Cyprus are of particular importance here. Finally, energy security in the region is analyzed through the cooperation of the countries with rights. Thirdly, the Türkiye–Greece dispute is explained together with the element of “concern” that also causes the security dilemma. Here, the historical background of bilateral relations is discussed, and it is explained how the conflict that has been going on for years has created a security dilemma and how their foreign policies have been shaped in this process. In particular, the discovery of energy resources in the region is evaluated together with the attitude followed by the two countries in their foreign policies. Fourthly, how the process leading to the security dilemma in bilateral relations was shaped was explained through the military activities in the region. In particular, the crises in the relations between Türkiye and Greece and the change in the military activities of the countries during the crisis periods were observed and the direction of the security dilemma was analyzed.

As a result, this study concludes that, contrary to popular belief, the economic interdependence in the Eastern Mediterranean creates a security dilemma between Türkiye and Greece. As a supporting factor, the change in the defense expenditures of both countries, military activities and crisis periods were taken as an intersection point and as a result, it was observed that Türkiye perceived a greater threat compared to Greece.

Conceptual Framework

The relationship between economic interdependence and war is one of the most debated topics in the international relations literature. While there are assumptions that economic interdependence has a diminishing effect on the likelihood of war, this study is based on the assumption that economic interdependence may have an increasing effect on this likelihood. This proposal stands out as a critique of the liberal approach and assumes that economic interdependence can also lead states to war. This claim leads us to knock on the door of realism as a critique of liberal theory. Trade ties are capable of creating a state of peace, as the liberal tradition claims. However, the argument that economic interdependence creates vulnerability for states, which realism emphasizes as a counterargument, is noteworthy. This vulnerability is fuelled by the dependent state having negative expectations for its economic future. In other words, when a dependent state is worried about its access to resources, realism kicks in and the state starts to

see war and conflict as the lesser of two evils. This anxiety that emerges in states and shapes their long-term policies leads us to the concept of the security dilemma.

The security dilemma, one of the most important conceptual approaches of classical realism, in Herz's words (1950), states that do not feel secure in an anarchic nature prepare for the worst and constantly seek to acquire power, resulting in a vicious circle of competition. In support of Herz, Butterfield (1951) also refers to Hobbesian fear, emphasizing the uncertainty that persists in the mutual intentions between states and the anxiety that arises as a natural consequence. Thus, each state can only rely on itself (self-help) for security. Jervis (1982), on the other hand, defines the security dilemma as the unintended consequence of defensive actions and focuses on the process by which *"the means that one state concentrates on in order to increase its security turn into a factor that reduces the security of another state"* (p. 169). Even if mutual goodwill is assured, every state emphasizes the possibility that it may face aggressive actions in the long run. This possibility and the concerns that states have been revealed through the security dilemma approach and the steps taken on the military ground. The study moves the security dilemma out of the military realm and into the economic realm and, in support of Copeland's work (2015), argues that economic interdependence can also create a security dilemma situation. At this point, there is an important theme that unites the security dilemma approach and the thesis put forward by Copeland (2015): *states' concern about each other's long-term actions* (p. 39).

In fact, this concern has such significant effects that states may favor conflict or peace. The paper uses Copeland's (2015) model of trade expectations to analyze this concern and the potential for conflict. The model focuses on the impact of trade and economic interdependence on large states and discusses the potential for conflict and peace. The study applies Copeland's analysis of great powers to regional powers and analyzes the effects of trade and economic interdependence on these states in terms of conflict and peace possibilities. Accordingly, the model states that state policies are shaped by assessments of the security situation and forecasts of the long-term power position in the system through the fictionalization of state Y and state X. It is the behavior of the dependent state that shapes the likelihood of conflict or peace in a region, and this state is referred to as state Y in the model. At this point, the level of dependence of state Y and its long-term trade prospects are very important for the model. If the leader of state Y needs access to state X's territory in terms of raw materials, investment, and markets, and is optimistic that state X will open this space to Y, it will be politically peaceful. However, if there is mistrust regarding the long-term activities of State X, then a negative change in the peaceful attitude of State Y can be observed.

With these points emphasized, as shown in Figure 1, one of the most important themes guiding X's economic policies towards Y is its assessments based on past experiences. If these assessments are unfavourable, state X may restrict resources, investment and

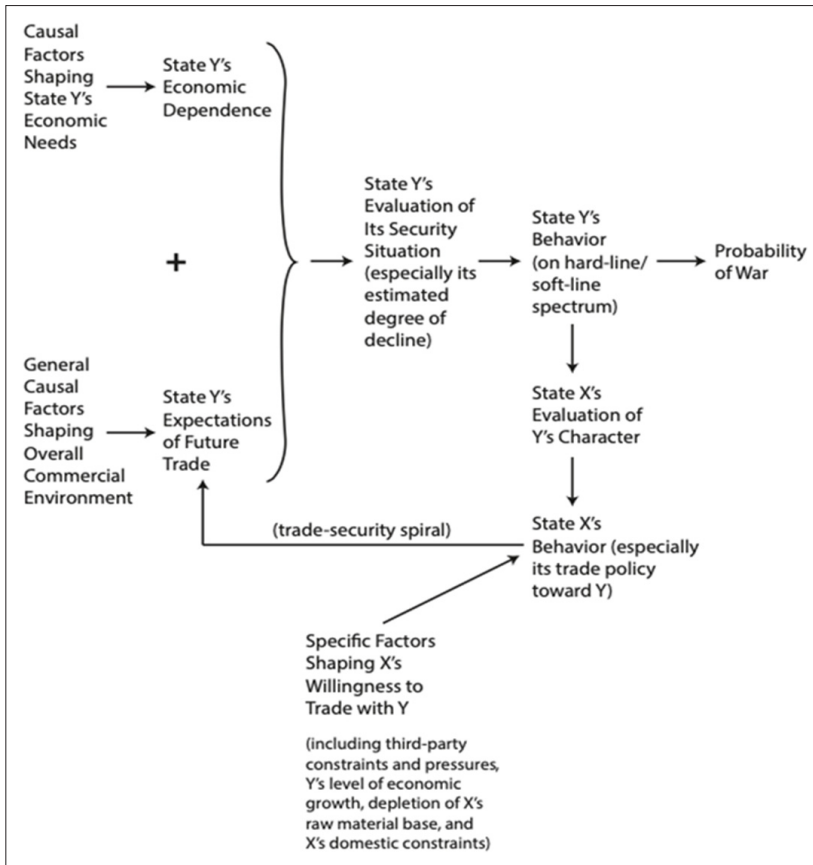


Figure 1: The Causal Logic of Trade Expectations Model

Sources: Copeland (2015, p. 49)

market access or take steps to support it. This approach between X and Y, which is particularly informed by past experiences, creates a trade-security spiral in the region. Thus, X's restrictive stance on trade leads Y to more assertive foreign policy making, which in turn pushes X to be tougher in its already restrictive trade activities, which in turn may increase Y's propensity for conflict. This cycle is crucial to see how the security dilemma emerges in the trade-security spiral. In this study, this spiral is measured through Türkiye's economic interdependence in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Türkiye and Greece in the Political Economy of the Eastern Mediterranean: Rising Economic Interdependence

Economic interdependence, constructed by Copeland (2015) through the trade expectations model, is one of the most important issues in the political economy of the Eastern Mediterranean. This trade interdependence manifests itself especially in the energy

field, making coordination between importers, exporters, and transit states necessary. This coordination is claimed to encourage cooperation between states in line with the peace pipelines hypothesis (Demiryol, 2019). However, as Copeland (2015) emphasizes, this dependency may increase competition and conflict possibilities, not cooperation. In terms of this approach, which constitutes the main thesis of the study, as seen in Table 1, two states stand out in terms of energy dependence: Türkiye and Greece.

Table 1: Natural Gas Reserves in Selected Countries in the Eastern Mediterranean

Country	Natural Gas Reserves (Trillion Cubic Feet)
Türkiye	0.11
Greece	0.04
Egypt	63.30
Israel	6.22
Lebanon	0.21

Sources: U.S. Energy Information Administration (2022)

Although the Eastern Mediterranean region has a geostrategic importance, the hydrocarbon deposits discovered in the region, especially in the early 2000s, have led to an increased interest in the region. The recent increase in the energy needs of states and the aggressive foreign policy pursued by Russia, which has a dominant role in the energy supply for many countries, especially Europe, has also increased the need for energy reserves in the region. As a result, the Eastern Mediterranean has emerged as a new area of competition for countries both in the region and outside the region with the issue of energy security. Although the Eastern Mediterranean has been discussed together with its energy reserves and the interest in the region has increased in the last two decades, the attempts of the countries in the region regarding energy reserves date back to earlier periods. The Greek Cypriot Administration of Southern Cyprus (GCASC)'s attempts in 1979 could not be continued as they were blocked by both Türkiye and the UN (Çalık Orhun, 2017). The root of this problem lies in the long-standing problems between Türkiye and Greece regarding the status of the island of Cyprus. Apart from this, another problem is related to the exclusive economic zones of the riparian states in the region. The exclusive economic zone (EEZ), which covers the area of 200 nautical miles from the coastline of a state, is the water layer outside the territorial waters, the seabed and its subsoil, and the maritime area where the coastal state is granted exclusive rights and powers (Pazarıcı, 2012).

However, the EEZs of the countries in the region overlap with each other, which has led to some disputes over energy security. The first EEZ-related agreement was signed between the GCASC and Egypt. Thus, thanks to the EEZ declared in 2003, the seismic



Map 1: EEZ Boundaries

Sources: Prince Michael of Liechtenstein (2020)

research and drilling activities of the GCASC started to increase (Furuncu, 2020b). Another factor affecting energy security in the region is the fact that riparian countries are composed of countries that can be characterized as ‘failed states’, and this situation creates problems both in the extraction and export of energy resources. The right to explore and extract energy resources is a right that all riparian states have. However, the GCASC acts as if the resources around the island of Cyprus belong only to itself and ignores the rights of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC). Thus, exploration licenses were unilaterally granted first to the US Noble Energy in 2011 and then to the Israeli Delek company. This situation caused the TRNC to make an agreement with the Turkish Petroleum Corporation (TPAO) in order to protect its rights (Çalık Orhun, 2017). In addition, a continental shelf delimitation agreement was signed between Türkiye and the TRNC in 2011, allowing TPAO to conduct exploration and drilling in certain parcels (Ateşoğlu Güney, 2020). Although no hydrocarbon reserves have yet been discovered in the parts where Türkiye has been drilling, reserves have been found in some areas announced by the GCASC. Among these, Noble Energy discovered 129 billion cubic meters of natural gas in the Aphrodite field in 2011 and the Italian company Eni discovered 169–226 cubic meters of natural gas in the Calypso field in 2018 (Furuncu, 2020a). Although these areas are stated as belonging to the GCASC, it should not be forgotten that the TRNC also has rights in all discoveries related to Cyprus.

Cyprus is an important country not only for Türkiye-Greece relations but also for countries outside the region due to its strategic location. It is an air and naval base, especially for countries that want to gain naval and air superiority in the Eastern Mediterranean.

The characteristic of Cyprus as an aircraft carrier provides the opportunity to intervene immediately in any conflict that may arise in the region, especially in the Middle East (Cankara, 2016). With the newly discovered hydrocarbon fields, four different energy fields have emerged around Cyprus, which play a key role in Türkiye–Greece relations. These are Leviathan, Aphrodite, Nile, and Herodotus. The GCASC made an agreement with Lebanon in 2007 and Israel in 2010 on the delimitation of maritime jurisdiction areas, but the fact that the Cyprus problem is a political problem has also manifested itself here (Kökyay, 2021). Ignoring the TRNC and acting as if all rights on the island of Cyprus belonged only to itself, the GCASC unilaterally invited international energy companies to the region to carry out drilling activities in line with the agreements it made with Egypt, Lebanon, and Israel (Ateşoğlu Güney, 2020).

In 2009 and 2010, with the discovery of significant amounts of natural gas in the Tamar and Leviathan regions and the discovery of unexplored energy resources in the region, the interest of the riparian countries in the region started to increase (Ataman & Güler, 2020). The table below provides information on the natural gas reserves recently discovered in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Table 2: Natural Gas Discoveries in the Eastern Mediterranean

Country	Discovery Name	Discovery Date	Reserves (Billion Cubic Meters)
Israel	Tamar	2009	305
	Leviathan	2010	649
	Tanin	2012	26
	Karish	2013	39
	Royee	2014	96
Cyprus	Aphrodite	2011	129
	Calypso	2018	150
	Glaucus	2019	142
Egypt	Zohr	2015	850
	Great Nooros	2016	85
	West Nile Delta	2015	77
	Atoll	2015	42

Sources: U.S. Energy Information Administration (2023)

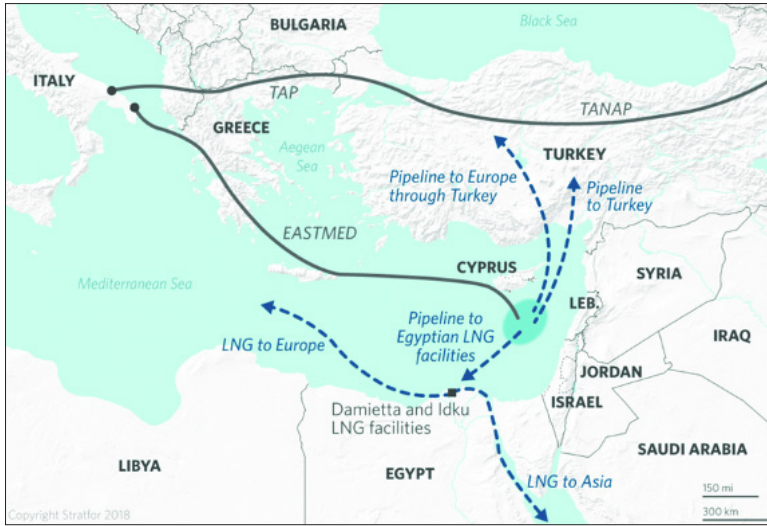
In this respect, it is clearly seen that Egypt, Israel, and the GCASC are the richest countries in the region in terms of energy resources. Egypt’s economy is largely dependent on oil revenues. Therefore, it is greatly affected by the fluctuations in oil prices. One of the largest recent discoveries in the Eastern Mediterranean (850 billion cubic meters) was made in the Zohr field in 2015 (Furuncu, 2020b). Egypt’s first goal with regard to

natural gas discoveries is to meet domestic demand and reduce foreign dependency as much as possible. Only after domestic demand is met, Egypt is expected to become an energy transfer center (Kurt & Duman, 2020). Thus, Egypt expects to profit from the energy trade. As a matter of fact, Egypt obtains most of its natural gas production from the Eastern Mediterranean. While the GCASC is a country with limited industrial production due to limited raw materials, the agricultural sector is the backbone of its economy. Although its EU membership and relations with Greece provide economic benefits, this is not a sustainable situation. As a matter of fact, GCASC is an importing country in the field of energy (Karagöl, 2020). Therefore, its need for energy is increasing day by day. Another country in the region that imports energy is Israel. Therefore, it is very important that energy security is sustainable.

The reserve discovered in Israel's Leviathan region corresponds to approximately two-thirds of all natural gas reserves discovered so far (Furuncu, 2020b). These natural gas discoveries in the Eastern Mediterranean have caused Israel to get excited. Israel has been continuing its drilling activities in the region since 1998. However, during the period when Türkiye-Israel relations were strained, it was seen that the GCASC turned this tension into an opportunity and made attempts against Türkiye and the TRNC. Israel started exporting natural gas to Jordan for the first time in 2020 in line with the agreement made by Noble Energy in 2016 (Kurt & Duman, 2020). As a result of the turmoil in the region due to the Arab Spring, Muammar Gaddafi died in Libya, one of the important countries for the Eastern Mediterranean, and civil war broke out in 2014. The power struggle in the country is still ongoing between the militias led by General Haftar, who staged a coup in 2016, and the Libyan National Army and the UN – recognized Government of National Accord. As a result, this situation led to a decrease in the country's hydrocarbon production and thus affected the economy (Karagöl, 2020). Due to its location in the Eastern Mediterranean, Libya is very important in terms of both natural gas and oil production. Therefore, the political instability in the country must be ended as soon as possible.

Türkiye, on the other hand, is one of the most advantageous countries in terms of energy security in the region with its energy infrastructure. Its international projects for energy imports to Europe (TANAP and TurkStream) have been of particular importance for Europe in this period of strained relations with Russia. Due to its strategic location, Türkiye will have an important role in the transportation of these energy resources, especially to Europe.

The fact that the costs of alternative routes are higher than the planned route through Türkiye makes Türkiye the preferred choice in this regard. The route planned through Israel-Cyprus-Türkiye for energy transportation to Europe is the most suitable among the existing routes, but Israel, Greece, and the GCASC are determined and insistent on the realization of the EastMed project as they approach the issue politically (Özekin,



Map 2: Eastern Mediterranean Energy Transmission Routes

Sources: Stratfor (2018)

2020). Of course, the support of the EU and the US is also key here. However, the EastMed pipeline, which is planned to be built, will have to travel a very long way to reach Europe and as a result, only 4% of European consumers will be met (Kurt & Duman, 2020). However, the 'Agreement on the Delimitation of Maritime Jurisdiction Areas' that Türkiye signed with the Libyan Government of National Accord in 2019 overlaps with the EastMed pipeline route and naturally requires the parties' permission to use this route. This agreement will also give Türkiye a legal advantage in the region.

Türkiye's drilling activities in the Eastern Mediterranean have gained momentum since 2019. Oruç Reis and Barbaros Hayrettin seismic research vessels, Yavuz, Fatih and Kanuni drill ships are operating there (Furuncu, 2020a). Türkiye's activities in the Eastern Mediterranean can be interpreted as protecting the rights of both the TRNC and itself. However, these activities have occasionally strained relations with the GCASC and Greece, as well as with the EU and the US. While the international community expected the EU to play a de-escalating role in the Eastern Mediterranean due to its 'mediator' role in many crisis regions, the EU supported the claims of the GCASC and Greece as a party (Ateşoğlu Güney, 2020). Türkiye, which claims to be a central country in the region for energy trade, shows its weight in the region by conducting 'energy diplomacy' through energy supply security. However, Türkiye was not invited to the Gas Forum as a result of its periodic problems with some other countries in the region (Egypt and Israel) (Kökay, 2021). The aim here is to exclude both Türkiye and the TRNC from the natural gas equation in the Eastern Mediterranean and prevent them from having a say here. For this reason, the 'Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum' was established

in early 2019 between Egypt, Israel, Palestine, Jordan, Greece, the GCASC, and Italy (Kavaz, 2020). However, the Russia-Ukraine crisis revealed Europe's urgent need for energy and the importance was attached to the transportation of energy resources in the Eastern Mediterranean to the European market. Unfortunately, it is still undecided how these energy resources will reach Europe. The debate over the discovery and subsequent routes of energy resources highlights two important themes in the Eastern Mediterranean: the growing interdependence in the region and the deepening rivalry between Türkiye and Greece. When viewed through these two themes, the "suspicion" factor gains importance in the perceptions of trade that Copeland emphasizes, which is fuelled by the mistrust of the two states.

"Security of Identity" as an Explanatory Unit

The points raised through energy geopolitics show that the theme of identity has an important place in the confrontation between Türkiye and Greece as two rivals in the region. Studies on the impact of identity on security perception in international relations emphasize the ontological security approach (Rumelili & Adısönmez, 2020). As emphasized in this approach, physical security and identity-based security explanations should be considered together, especially in situations of recurrent conflict. This method, which facilitates understanding the nature and driving force of conflict in protracted conflict situations, focuses on the security of identity as a complement to the themes of energy and physical security in the Eastern Mediterranean. Ontological security, which means securing identity across time and space, provides this security through routines (Sarı Ertem & Düzgün, 2021). Routines are maintained through any relationship (conflict or cooperation) established with the opposing identity. The continuity of the status quo is very important, otherwise, ontological insecurity emerges. Therefore, when it comes to the role of identity in the rivalry between Türkiye and Greece, historical data is quite revealing.

From this point of view, the long-standing maritime disputes between the two states and their sovereignty claim in connection with these disputes are important points that include the long-term factor of "distrust" and "suspicion". These themes, which also reveal the importance of historical memory for nations, are evident in the minorities issue, the Cyprus dispute, and the disputes over the Aegean Sea. These topics, which express the formation of a sense of identity-based mistrust between the two states, came to life, especially in the atmosphere caused by the Turkish War of Independence. In this period, the struggle against the Ottoman "yoke" offered Greece the opportunity to expand its territory and build a Greek nation. The modern Turkish Republic, on the other hand, emphasizes the struggle for independence against the Greek occupying troops in Western and Central Anatolia during the same period. This process, which represented a critical issue for both Greece and Türkiye in the process of gaining their national identity, became very prominent under the heading of minorities. In the conferences held

in Lausanne, it was decided to exchange the Orthodox Greeks remaining in Türkiye and the Muslim Turks remaining in Greece regarding the status of the peoples who would remain beyond the borders (Bozdağlıoğlu, 2014). This issue continued to be a point of disagreement during the process and the question of who would be considered residents remained. In addition, the events of September 6–7, 1955, and the abrogation of the Residence, Trade and Seyrisefain Agreement in conjunction with the 1964 Decree were developments that put the Greek presence in Türkiye in a difficult situation. With the 1930 Treaty, both the problem of population exchange was solved, and arrangements were made regarding the property of the Turkish and Greek people. With the events of September 6–7, 15 people lost their lives and martial law was declared on the night of September 6 as a result of the escalation of hate speech and incitement against the Greek people living in Istanbul. Another development that supported the perception of mistrust in bilateral relations was the abrogation of the Residence, Trade, and Travel Treaty. Signed in 1930 between Turkish Prime Minister İsmet İnönü and Greek Prime Minister Eleftherios Venizelos, the Agreement allowed citizens of both countries to travel and trade with each other. In 1964, Türkiye announced its unilateral termination of the Agreement. The process of deportation, blocking of bank accounts and liquidation of businesses significantly weakened bilateral relations.

As a subjective concept, ontological security, which has more to do with perceptions (Sarı Ertem & Düzgün, 2021), is noteworthy due to the importance that states attach to identity in foreign policy decision-making processes. As a matter of fact, while these developments came to the fore as steps that fed the concerns based on the “security of identity” between Türkiye and Greece, the 1974 Cyprus Peace Operation (Aksu, 2014 pp. 5–6) initiated a long period of “suspicion” and “anxiety” in bilateral relations. In fact, the Cyprus problem dates back to the 1950s, when minority disputes between the two states remained intense. In this period, the Greek Cypriots’ desire to be annexed to Greece and Greece’s favorable view of this desire was the main development that led to a Turkish–Greek conflict. In the face of this demand regarding the Island, which was left to the British sovereignty with the Treaty of Lausanne, Türkiye stated that the Island was under British sovereignty. Negotiations started between Türkiye, which wanted the island to be left to itself if this domination was to end, and Greece, which was positive about the demands of the Greeks, and Britain decided to transfer its sovereignty over the Island to the Republic of Cyprus (Günay, 2007). With this decision taken in exchange for two sovereign base regions, it was decided that the political equality of the two communities and the status of the island would be under the guarantee of Britain, Greece and Türkiye.

Although this step painted a positive picture of long-term stability on the island, disagreements over the exercise of constitutional rights and powers revived unrest among the communities and this process turned into *de facto* conflict. While the 1963

massacres known as “Bloody Christmas” triggered difficult-to-repair divisions between the communities, the pro-enosis Nikos Sampson’s coming to power with a *coup d’état* and moreover his desire to connect Greece to Cyprus influenced Türkiye’s decision to intervene in the attacks. With these developments, the Cyprus Peace Operation was launched on July 20, 1974, and this operation was the only time after the Turkish War of Independence that the two states engaged in hot conflict. With the operation, the Turks retreated to the north of the Island and the Greeks to the south. For the societies that started to live under separate administrations on both sides of the “Green Line”, no initiative was observed to put into practice the UN Security Council’s resolutions on the establishment of a federation based on the political equality of the parties (Aksu, 2014). In the process, even though steps were taken by the UN Security Council with the Annan Plan, a UN Plan aiming to unite the island as an independent state by eliminating the divided structure of the Island of Cyprus between the Turkish and Greek Cypriots, no results were obtained due to the Greek Cypriots’ no vote. The most important division between the two communities after the 1974 Cyprus Peace Operation was the inclusion of the Greek Cypriot Southern Cyprus in the EU (Güner, 2020), which on the one hand deepened the rift between the peoples of the island and the other hand strengthened the relationship based on “suspicion” between Türkiye and Greece.

In this process, the issue of identity insecurity, which gained momentum between the two states with the Cyprus problem, also manifested itself in the dispute over the Aegean Islands. The issue of the Aegean Islands takes the two states back to Lausanne, and the main theme of the dispute is that Greece increased its territorial waters from 3 miles to 6 miles and its airspace from 3 miles to 10 miles between the two world wars (Şen, 2015). After the Second World War, the cession of the Dodecanese Islands to Greece deepened the dispute. The Aegean Islands, which represent an important area in the rise of threat perception between the two states, represent critical areas that brought hot conflict to the agenda starting in the 1970s and throughout the 1990s. After the 1982 signing of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, Greece expressed its desire to increase its territorial waters in the Aegean from 6 to 12 miles (Şen, 2015), and Türkiye became increasingly concerned that the Aegean would be turned into a Greek lake. These concerns were reflected in the letter written by the then-Turkish Foreign Minister İhsan Sabri Çağlayangil to US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger on April 15, 1976:

“The main ambition of the Greek Government is to create a fait accompli by extending the territorial waters to 12 miles and thereby gain a political victory over Türkiye. Such a move would turn the Aegean Sea into a Greek lake and, as a result, would eliminate Türkiye’s natural and established customary rights in this sea (Küçük, 2021, p. 30)”.

Aside from these growing concerns in Türkiye, Greece shapes its security strategy with the “fear of Türkiye” that dominates its security culture. Seeing Ankara as a revisionist

country that challenges the Lausanne Treaty and ultimately aims to change it, Greece acts with the perception of a “threat from the East”. The perception of “threat from the East” has manifested itself in Athens with the annexation of the islands. In terms of its territorial expansion, Türkiye states that it has been “exploited from its coasts to the midline” (Axt, 2021) in the face of Greece, which annexed the Ionian Islands, Thessaly, Macedonia and Crete, Epirus and the Eastern Aegean Islands and Western Thrace through the “Great Idea – Megali Idea” (Ak, 2018), the idea of reviving the Byzantine Empire. Hercules Millas draws attention to Turkish and Greek history, the mutual steps taken and the impact these steps had on both sides:

“For historical reasons, each side perceives the other as a possible threat and a challenge to its own identity. It realizes every action accordingly and this creates a vicious circle (Heraclides, 2011).”

The mutually nurtured perception of the other and the threat is carried to such a point that both sides begin to need each other as “enemies” and this need has been determined by “chosen traumas” and “chosen victories” (Heraclides, 2011). The bilateral and identity-based mistrust fed by historical developments has persisted in the post-2000s and has manifested itself, especially in maritime strategies. For Türkiye, this strategic approach has been realized through the Blue Homeland doctrine, while Greece has been acting with the goal of creating deterrence in the seas through armament on the islands and alliance relations. The Blue Homeland Doctrine, which was implemented in line with the goal of becoming a great naval power, was brought to the agenda by Admiral Cem Gürdeniz in 2006 (Grigoriadis, 2022; Denizeau, 2021). The doctrine, which includes all of Türkiye’s declared and undeclared maritime jurisdiction areas, aims to ensure Türkiye’s effectiveness in the 462 thousand square kilometers covering the EEZ, continental shelf, internal waters, and territorial waters.

The doctrine, which is considered an important approach to establishing influence in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea, is viewed with suspicion by Greece due to its intensified activities in the Mediterranean (Heraclides, 2011). The “fear of expansionism” towards Türkiye is also discussed through the doctrine and it is aimed to create deterrence against these steps through alliances in the international arena, especially armament in the islands. These steps, which focus on the goal of regional expansion in both states, are very important in terms of seeing the security dilemma created by identity-based insecurity among the actors.

From Suspicion to Security Dilemma

The historical elements that emphasize suspicion and mistrust show that relations between Türkiye and Greece have been shaped in a process dominated by long-term conflict dynamics. While this process dates back to 1923, the table below shows how suspicion and conflict are intertwined when we look at the crises between the two

states as a whole:

Table 3: Crises in Türkiye–Greece Relations

Long Lasting Conflict No Military Violence	Long Lasting Conflict Threat of the Use of Force	Long Lasting Conflict Limited War
Crisis of September 6–7, 1955	1964 Cyprus Crisis	1974 Cyprus Crisis
1974–76 Aegean Crisis	1967 Cyprus Crisis	
1974–80 NOTAM Crisis	1987 Aegean Continental Shelf Crisis	
1981 Limni Crisis	1996 Kardak Rocks Crisis	
1984 Western Thrace Crisis	1997 S-300 Missile Crisis	
1994–95 Aegean Crisis	1998 Syria – Ocalan Crisis	

Sources: Aksu (2014, p. 13)

In 1997, during this period when maritime disputes were at the forefront, Türkiye announced its new naval strategy titled *Towards the High Seas*. This strategy emphasized the desire to operate on the high seas and emphasized long-term maritime interests and security. This strategy, announced at a stage when maritime disputes with Greece intensified, underlined the goal of taking an active role in the nearby basins (Özgen, 2017). The doctrine, which includes the aim of advancing the ongoing defense industry, also emphasizes the modernization of the navy and has found its place under the Blue Homeland approach. The *Towards the High Seas* approach, which is a reflection of an assertive foreign policy, has been revised due to technological developments and increased energy exploration activities, especially as of 2010. Underlining the qualities of being reliable in cooperation, deterrent in crises, and decisive in combat, and the goal of “*being strong at sea in order to be secure in the homeland and being present in all seas in order to have a say in the world*”, Blue Homeland emphasized a wider geographical area compared to the previous strategy (Özgen, 2017).

The doctrine, which considers the protection of sea lines of communication as an important goal, aims to establish influence on energy routes in this way. In this way, it will be upgraded from the Medium Regional Power Projection Capability to the Medium Global Power Projection Capability (Özel, 2021). Overseas exercises, modernization of defense and alliance relations are considered as supportive steps in this direction. In the face of this approach of Türkiye, which has set out long-term strategic goals regarding maritime jurisdictions with the Blue Homeland doctrine, Greek Prime Minister Miçotakis said (Cumhuriyet, 2023), “*Turkish revisionism, expressed with the Blue Homeland doctrine, is embedded in the DNA of all Turkish parties. I am always ready to discuss the only difference between us, which is the delimitation of maritime zones. The policy of strong deterrence and strong alliances must continue*”.

This approach put forward by Miçotakis gives important clues regarding both the view of the Blue Homeland doctrine and the steps Greece will take in the face of this step. In

fact, before the Blue Homeland doctrine, Greece had already determined a maritime strategy in favor of maintaining the deterrence and strong alliance approach mentioned above. In this sense, it would be appropriate to say that there is continuity in its regional strategy in the face of the Blue Homeland doctrine. The concepts of revisionism, deterrence, and strong alliances used by Miçotakis when it comes to Türkiye and maritime strategy have been addressed in a way to include military expenditures, especially after 2010. In this period, Greece, which emphasized military expenditures despite the economic crisis, acted in line with the goal of shaping Türkiye's long-term steps in the region with its "balancing engagement strategy" (Ifantis, 2018). As internal and external stabilizers, steps have been taken to strengthen alliance behavior on the one hand and deepen security strategy on the other.

From Türkiye's perspective, the Maritime Jurisdiction Agreement with Libya stands out in these steps, which are reflected in the alliance behavior of both states. In fact, Türkiye started to question the Western security umbrella in the process from the doctrine of Towards the Open Seas in 1997 to the Blue Homeland in 2015. In this questioning, which also manifested itself in naval activities, Türkiye emphasized the importance of relations with NATO and Western states, but also emphasized the importance of expanding areas of cooperation. From this point of view, the increasing energy competition after 2010 and the effect of the crisis areas with Greece, the Continental Shelf Delimitation Agreement signed with the TRNC on September 21, 2011 was followed by the Libyan Maritime Jurisdiction Areas Agreement dated November 27, 2019. After this agreement, the two states signed a Defense and Cooperation Agreement on November 28, 2020. Following Türkiye's steps, Greece signed an EEZ Delimitation Agreement with Egypt on August 6, 2020 (Acer, 2020).

While Greece objected to the agreement on the grounds that it "*violates the continental shelf areas of its islands*", Greek Foreign Minister Dendias stated that "*a treaty has been signed that is the absolute opposite of the illegal, null and void and legally baseless memorandum of understanding signed between Türkiye and Tripoli. With the signing of this agreement, the non-existent Turkish-Libyan agreement ended up where it belonged all along: in the trash can*" (Reuters, 2020). Regarding the agreement signed between Greece and Egypt, the Turkish Foreign Ministry said, "*There is no maritime border between Greece and Egypt. The so-called maritime delimitation agreement signed today is null and void for Türkiye. Our understanding will be demonstrated in the field and at the table*" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Türkiye, 2020).

In addition to the Agreement signed with Egypt, Greece and the US defense contacts in the region have also been remarkable for Türkiye. On October 5, 2019, Greece and the US signed a Defense Cooperation Agreement (U.S. Department of State, 2021a). The US described the document as "*an effective document to react to current security challenges in the Eastern Mediterranean*", and the agreement included the activities to

be carried out by the US-Greece-NATO in Alexandroupoli, Larissa, and Stefanovikio. Pompeo, who met with Greek Foreign Minister Dendieas during the agreement process, stated that *“they told the Turks that illegal drilling activities are unacceptable, that they are trying to ensure that legal activities take place in every area where international law prevails, and that they will continue to take diplomatic steps on this issue as they always do”* (Gülbay, 2022).

In addition to Greece, the United States, which has established close contacts with the GCASC, lifted the arms embargo it had been imposing since 1987 (Atlamazoğlu, 2023) and gave important messages that they would improve their cooperation in the field of defense (U.S. Department of State, 2021b). France, as another state with close relations with Greece and the GCASC, has been conducting military exercises in the region in line with the goal of “increasing its defense potential”. Interpreting this alliance as *“encouraging the Greek Cypriot-Greek duo to dangerously escalate tensions further”*, Türkiye sent a research vessel accompanied by warships to the region, which Greece claimed to be its EEZ, and Greece responded with a similar step. During this period, Greece’s purchase of weapons systems and warships from France was another source of tension in bilateral relations. In this process, the US stated that it would use its military and diplomatic presence in the region to reduce tensions between the two NATO member states (Gülbay, 2022).

Although dialogue initiatives between the two states were launched during the process, no success was achieved. The 2020 EU Leaders’ Summit was an important date in terms of these initiatives. At the summit, Greece demanded sanctions against Türkiye and criticized Germany for its arms sales to Türkiye. While no sanctions decision came out of the summit, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg’s statements before the summit that *“we need to address differences and disagreements, but we also need to recognize that Türkiye is part of NATO and part of the Western family”* drew attention (Gülbay, 2022).

Both states did not refrain from taking military steps, and the establishment of a base and the deployment of military equipment by Türkiye at the intersection of the Aegean and the Mediterranean demonstrated the aim of establishing military activity in the region (Choulis *et al.*, 2021). Since 2006, Türkiye’s Operation Mediterranean Shield with attack boats, unmanned aerial vehicles, submarines and helicopters has been another dimension of Türkiye’s activity in the region, while Greece has been sending important messages about its maritime domain with similar steps. The MEDUSA military exercise, which is carried out regularly with Egypt and the Greek Cypriot Administration, is one of the important steps taken in this direction in the region (Gök & Mavruk, 2022). The military exercises that Greece conducts every year with Egypt have been described by Ankara as *“an effort to escalate tension in the Mediterranean”*.

In addition to alliance behavior and military exercises, another issue that has been emphasized has been the arms race. Especially after the 1996 Kardak Rocks crisis,

both states took steps to increase their armaments, which is important in observing the mutual increase in threat perception. The sovereignty claims that emerged after an accident on the reefs and the eventual transformation of the issue into a security problem brought along the military structuring efforts of the two states in the region. The lowering of mutually erected flags and the confrontation of warships around the reefs raised tensions in the region. In the process, the crisis was calmed down, especially with the US statement that it would intervene in the first use of force (Gök & Mavruk, 2022). This incident, which took place in an area with a relatively weak strategic and regional position such as the Kardak Rocks, caused negative comments in terms of the military consequences of an incident that could shift to strategic areas (Şihmantepe, 2013; Gök & Mavruk, 2022). As shown in the tables below, there have been significant increases in armament rates after 1996:

Table 4: Comparison of Defense Expenditures of Türkiye and Greece (1990–1999)

	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
Türkiye	8157	8385	8820	9751	9534	9794	10961	11424	11970	13217
Greece	5986	5677	5900	5759	5858	5983	6342	6758	7364	7710

Sources: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (2020)

Table 5: Comparison of Defense Expenditures of Türkiye and Greece (2009–2019)

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Türkiye	11385	11184	11280	11556	11868	11955	12302	14423	15480	19649	20796
Greece	9628	7398	5957	5268	4920	4880	5175	5390	5386	5757	5732

Sources: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (2020)

A comparative analysis of the period from 1990 to 2020 shows to what extent the Kardak Crisis process increased the armament tendency. On the other hand, especially in the Eastern Mediterranean, it is possible to say that the threat perception has increased more in Türkiye than in Greece. Looking at the data on Türkiye, it is observed that while the increase continued after 2009, Greece has relatively cut its defense expenditures. When this difference is evaluated in terms of the security dilemma, it shows that there is a higher level for Türkiye.

Conclusion

Although the problems between Türkiye and Greece have a long historical background, bilateral relations are mostly managed through perceptions. The perception that the other is perceived as a threat and especially that this perception is made through identities has recently been demonstrated in security studies with the ontological security understanding. Türkiye and Greece, which have a tense relationship model due to the

Aegean Islands and especially the Cyprus issue, have been caught in the middle of a new struggle with the energy discoveries in the Eastern Mediterranean, especially after 2010. Here, it has been observed that the problem of territorial waters, continental shelf and EEZ in the Aegean Sea has deepened even more. After analyzing the cooperation and activities of Türkiye and Greece in the Eastern Mediterranean with the understanding of economic interdependence, it has been seen that bilateral relations have evolved into a security dilemma with the effect of suspicion and anxiety factors. Historical conflicts and crises have a great impact here. As a matter of fact, the change in the defense expenditures of both countries has enabled us to produce data that supports this situation.

This study, which discusses the impact of economic interdependence on the maritime dispute between Türkiye and Greece in the Eastern Mediterranean, analyzes the defense expenditures of both Türkiye and Greece in times of crisis and reveals that Türkiye has more security concerns than Greece. It is normally assumed that economic interdependence has an effect on bilateral relations that reduces the likelihood of conflict. However, this study shows that economic interdependence can create a security dilemma and increase the likelihood of conflict. Contrary to approaches that address the security dilemma through military activities, this study applies Copeland's trade prospects model and analyzes the relations between Greece and Türkiye through economic and trade activities. Political approaches to economic and commercial activities have been particularly manifested in the mutually emerging theme of identity security. As both states saw their commercial security in jeopardy in the long run, they acted to compete in many areas, especially in the determination of energy and trade routes. Türkiye and Greece, which do not see their identity as secure, have tended to shape their alliance behaviour in parallel with energy exploration in the region and to take steps towards defense. This situation supports Copeland's assumption that a state that sees its commercial security in danger and is suspicious of the other state will be caught in a security dilemma.

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