# GAS DISCOVERIES IN CYPRUS: THE RUSSIAN PERSPECTIVE

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## 1. Introduction

Gas explorations in the Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ) of Cyprus have been at the forefront of regional and international attention since 2010. Although current test drillings have estimated moderate quantities[1] with limited global impacts, the gas fields of Aphrodite, Calypso and Glaucus still possess considerable importance in the geopolitics of the Eastern Mediterranean (Tsakiris 2017; Tzimitras 2019; Mehmet and Yorucu 2020; Evaghorou 2020; Marketos 2021). Studies over the past years have recognized this regional significance and, among other issues, reviewed causes and implications of bilateral energy disputes, analysed the feasibility of multilateral partnerships, and examined economic viabilities of export options (Gürel et al. 2013, 45-72; Kirişci 2014; Tagliapietra 2014; Ellinas et al. 2016; Ruble 2017; Demirol 2018; Kontos and Bitsis 2018; Ersoy 2019, Lindenstrauss and Gavrielides 2019; Tziarras 2019). In addition to regional actors, the role of the European Union (EU) has also been frequently investigated. EU oriented research findings have indicated potentials to reduce Russian gas dependence, focused on drilling rights obtained by European companies[2], and examined support for the planned East Med pipeline, which has been confirmed as Project of Common Interest (PCI) (Tagliapietra 2013; Mavroyiannis 2014; Tagliapietra 2016; Tsakiris et al. 2018; Tsakiris 2018).

While the EU's role has been relatively well demonstrated, only few individual studies sought to explain the influence of other principal powers. Well-established results related to the United States (US) and China were published in papers with wider scopes or country-specific case studies (Chopsey and Brown 2014; El-Katiri and El-Katiri 2014; Dimou 2019; Özdemir 2020; Evaghorou 2020; Marketos 2021). In the case of US, these studies have outlined an ambivalent strategy that is simultaneously aiming to achieve regional stability, smooth relations with allies, and economic benefits through American companies[3] licensed in Cypriot EEZ blocks (Dimou 2019, 19-20; Özdemir 2020, 117; Evaghorou 2020: 115). In the case of China, Marketos (2021, 63) have described a more pragmatic Eastern Mediterranean approach in which Beijing is carefully balancing between the exploitation of economic opportunities and avoidance of sensitive areas that may interfere with the "more valuable" Chinese-Turkish and Chinese-Greek partnerships.

Besides the previously mentioned regional and global actors, Russia is another principal power in Cyprus. As in the whole Eastern Mediterranean, the literature has also detected an expanding Russian influence in the Republic of Cyprus (RoC), where Moscow has left an influential political, economic, and cultural footprint. With such an extensive and multisectoral influence, it could be assumed that Russia, a top supplier in the global gas market, also plays a prominent role in the emerging Greek Cypriot gas industry. Such assumptions may be further reinforced by Russia's

[1] Estimated quantities: Aphrodite: ~141,5 billion cubic meters (bcm), Calypso: ~181,2 bcm, Glaucus: ~141,5 bcm. Bowlus, 2020.
[2] E.g., ENI, TOTAL, BP.
[3] E.g., ExxonMobile, Nobel Energy, Chevron.

regional involvements that have gained significant interests in the Egyptian, Lebanese, and Syrian offshore gas sectors. Cyprus, however, seems to be different from these examples, as in this case there has been no active Russian intervention in the developing gas business. The literature has repeatedly drawn attention to this notable anomaly. According to Evaghorou (2020, 116) Russian companies *"…have not participated and are not involved in any schemes for the exploitation of hydrocarbons in the Cypriot EEZ"*. In the opinion of Paraschos (2013, 54) *"Gazprom's lack of apparent interest in Cyprus is notable"*. Stergiou (2019: 61) has also indicated that the Russian *"[e]conomic and political elites do not view EastMed gas as a threat to their economic interests."* While these sources acknowledged that Russian companies have shown some interests in the developing Greek Cypriot gas industry, they nevertheless agreed that Moscow's influence has been still limited.

This paper seeks to understand the causes of this limited influence. It asks why Russia has not developed close(r) gas cooperation with the RoC, despite having extensive influence over several sectors, including economy and domestic politics. The research question seeks to unfold a theoretical anomaly: it explores why the realist argument fails to explain limited Russian influence in the developing Greek Cypriot gas industry. The paper assumes that wide sets of domestic factors constrain the implementation of realist logic, which would predestine a more extensive Russian involvement with efforts to accumulate power potentials and control an emerging competitor. To answer these questions, the study will employ the theoretical and methodological framework of neoclassical realism, which has been recently applied to understand both Greek Cypriot and Russian foreign policies (Kropatcheva 2012; Romanova 2012; Becker et al. 2016; Tziarras 2019; Zachariades and Petrikkos, 2020). As a comprehensive tool for foreign policy analysis and theory of international politics, neoclassical realism attempts to overcome the shortcomings of structural realism by acknowledging and accommodating the determinative role of domestic political factors (Ripsman et al. 2016, 7; Smith 2018). With such an updated toolbox involving both independent systemic and intervening unit-level variables, neoclassical realism will explain the failure of classical realist argument and detect the domestic constraints of Russian and Greek Cypriot gas cooperation.

## 2. Theoretical Background

Energy deposits play a significant role in the realist logic. The classical realist argument considers energy a vital source of power, a strategic tool in the competition with other states. Hans Morgenthau, the classical author of the realist theory, has labelled natural resources as an element of national power, a *"relatively stable factor that exerts an important influence upon the power of a nation with respect to other nations"* (Morgenthau 1948, 82). The quotation reveals that classical realism considers energy deposits as potential sources of power maximalization; it regards them as strategic supplies helping to expand the state's power potentials and security. As in the anarchic international system the struggle for power and security is continuous, states, driven by the moral responsibility of national survival and the desire to dominate (Morgenthau 1948, 17), seek to maximise the control of material capabilities, including energy resources (Česnakas 2010, 36-38). Great Powers are particularly interested in controlling material resources as their motivations are defined by efforts of power maximalization and the interests of covering the costs of their leading positions. According to Robert Gilpin, *"[a]lthough control over an international system provides economic benefits (revenues) to the dominant power or powers, domination also involves costs in manpower and material resources"* (Gilpin 1981, 156).

As classical realism, neorealism also maintains a states-centric view, though placing special emphasis on the systemic level. The neorealist argument considers the international system as a structural constrain that affect all actors in the structure while defining the responses of rational units by forcing them to adapt to the changes of anarchy. According to Kenneth Waltz, asymmetric distribution of capabilities makes difference between interacting units whose aim, beyond the simplified motive of survival, is to overcome disadvantageous effects of anarchy and increase their own security (Waltz 1979, 91-92). Defensive and offensive realist, however, define preconditions and consequences of security differently. Proponents of defensive realists assert that the constant need for security pushes states towards counterbalancing, which has a persistent purpose of maintaining as many capabilities as the competitors (Ibid, 131). For offensive realists, security seeking requires a more dominant strategy, thus producing a more hegemonic behaviour. According to Mearsheimer, states seek security through hegemonic behaviour: *"Only a misguided state would pass up an opportunity to be the hegemon in the system because it thought it already had sufficient power to survive"* (Mearsheimer 2001, 35). As the view on security, the purpose of natural resources also differs in defensive and offensive realism. On the one hand, defensive authors consider energy resources as significant pillars of economic power that may enhance or weaken states' power through absence or abundance. On the other hand, offensive realists view energy from the hard power's point of view: they regard energy as a source of wealth that can be converted into military strength (Česnakas 2010, 42; 44).

Although based on different arguments, both classical and structural realists acknowledge the significance of energy resources. They claim that control of energy is important for both exporting and importing states, as it increases the state's security and reduces negative effects of the anarchic international system. As Klare puts it, *"oil and natural gas represent vital commodities whose acquisition constitutes a matter of national security"* (Klare 2017, 41). Although all states concentrate on natural resources, the realist reasoning gives special importance to great powers, from whom hegemonic energy policies are expected. According to the realist perception, newly discovered hydrocarbon deposits represent particular importance for energy hegemons, as emerging energy systems may advance supply, economic, political, and environmental opportunities (Högselius 2019, 81-85). In other words, promising hydrocarbon discoveries attract the attention of dominant energy actors who *"have to make sure that if the pie is expanding, they are getting at least some portion of the increase"* (Mearsheimer 2001, 52). To sum up, traditional realist theories would predestine active energy intervention from Great Powers: their reasoning would assume that dominant states seek to exploit new energy opportunities, particularly in those cases where active regional influence and presence of weaker states provide relatively easy access to control behaviour of potential competitors.

The absence of such dominant behaviour would certainly contradict the traditional realist argument. As Česnakas puts it (2010, 39), *"[c]lassical realism cannot explain why states controlling great reserves of energy resources do not use them as tools for power expansion".* The literature explains the presence of such anomalies with human intervention. Högselius (2019, 81) believes that individuals in energy affairs maintain *"their own specific world views, agendas, visions, moods and desires"* and *"do not necessarily follow any rational algorithms".* Among the theories dealing with human intervention, this paper utilizes neoclassical realism, which was designed to overcome realist deficiencies and introduce the analysis of domestic variables.

Rose, who coined the term neoclassical realism, argues that foreign policies are not driven only by material capabilities and positions in the international hierarchy but also internal factors whose policy choices significantly impact states' behaviour (1998, 146-147). In this sense, domestic units are intervening variables, imperfect 'transmission belts' linking systemic levels and material capabilities to domestic factors of foreign policy choices (Innenpolitik). Nevertheless, their presence has not diminished the neorealist role of systemic level, rather produced an analytical framework by connecting foreign policy outcomes (dependent variables) with external (independent variables) and domestic (intervening variables) factors (Ripsman et al. 2016; Tziarras 2019, 55). Moreover, it took more than a decade, neoclassical realism has not only bridged external and internal, but also the theories of foreign policy behaviour and international politics (Smith 2018). According to Ripsman et al., as a logical extension of the realist tradition, contemporary neoclassical realism goes well beyond the original task of addressing anomalies and explain foreign policy behaviours (2016, 1; 16). They argue that *"neoclassical realist theory can explain political phenomena ranging from short- term crisis decisionmaking, foreign policy behavior, and patterns of grand strategic adjustment of individual states, to systemic outcomes, and ultimately to the evolution of the structure of the international system itself"* (Ripsman et al. 2016, 1).

## 3. Hypothesis and methodology

Building on these theoretical arguments, the paper seeks to understand how the neoclassical realist framework explains the limited Russian gas influence in Cyprus. In terms of hypothesis, it argues that *the otherwise predictable Russian involvement was constrained by domestic variables that limited gas cooperation on both the Russian and Greek Cypriot sides*. To test the hypothesis, the study applies analytical frameworks of neoclassical realism. Based on Ripsman et al. methodological proposals, the paper separates three units of analysis: it distinguishes the Systemic Level, the Unit Level, and the category of Foreign Policy Outcomes which includes the discussion as well (Ripsman 2016, 33-98). Since a multidimensional analysis is not possible here, the study focuses on mainly on the positions of Russian gas sector, mentioning other elements of bilater relations only at the unit level.

Based on the methodology defined by Ripman et al., the paper identifies two relevant subcategories in the Systemic Level. Global level (4.1) will discuss overall characteristics of Russian gas positions, while the regional level (4.2.) will outline Moscow's gas standings in the Eastern Mediterranean. In both cases, the structure and content of respective subsections follow the methodological requirements of neoclassical realism, i.e., global and regional levels are both applied to outline the details of *relative distribution of power* and *systemic clarity.* Relative distribution of power refers to the allocation and hierarchies of global and regional power capacities, in the case of present study, it refers to Russia's positions in the global and regional geopolitics of natural gas (Ibid., 34-38). Systemic clarity concentrates on the global and regional threats and opportunities that influence Russian gas diplomacy decisions in either negative or positive directions (Ibid., 46-52).

Turning towards the unit level, the literature differentiates between various types of intervening variables (Ibid, 33-79). Among these, the factors of *strategic culture, leader images*, *state-society relations*, and *domestic institutions* are examined here. External and internal variables are connected in the section of Foreign Policy Outcomes which analyses Russian foreign policy

decisions related to RoC's hydrocarbon explorations and developing gas industry. This section also includes a discussion which verifies or disproves hypothesis and outlines causes.

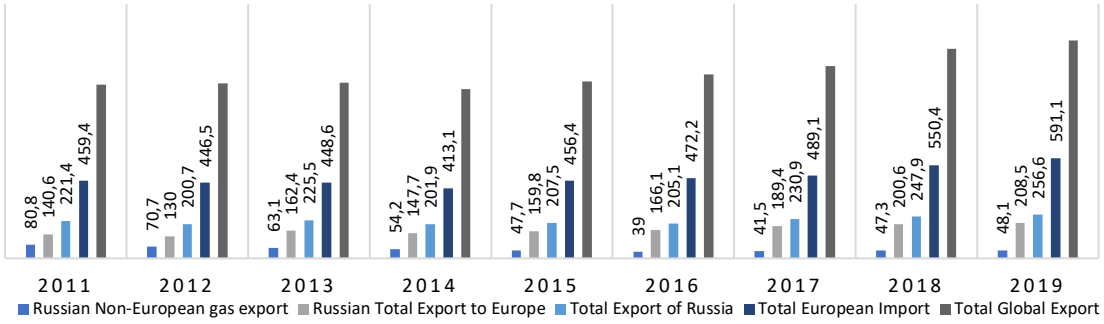
## 4. The Systemic Level

This section examines the geopolitical positions of Russian natural gas industry. Before discussing its global and Eastern Mediterranean characteristics, it is important to note that Moscow's systemic capabilities are of course not only influenced by its role in the geopolitics of natural gas. The country's power base is multidimensional, with highly developed and effective sectors on the one hand, and spheres of severe dysfunctionality on the other. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to examine these, it is worth noting that the literature has developed divergent views on Russia's power capacities. Some analysts have detected a significant rise in terms of power capacities, the resurgence of a *great* power that is successfully seeking to establish a multipolar world order (See: Kuhrt & Feklyunina, 2017). Others have reported on the continuing decline of Russia, a *regional* power that suffers from structural problems and applies assertive policies to hide them (Tsygankov, 2010). The truth may be somewhere in between. As Stoner put it, despite its major weaknesses Russia is a *"good enough"* power that possess the autocratic rule, the capability, and the will *"to disrupt the prevailing international order and to define a new one"* (Stoner 2020, 44). These controversies are perhaps more evident in the gas sector.

### *4.1. Global level: Russian role in the geopolitics of natural gas*

To begin the analysis with the relative distribution of (gas) power, it can be highlighted that currently, Russia has the largest proved natural gas reserves in the world. The country controls about 38 trillion cubic metres (tcm) of proven national resources, which represented about 19% of the global proved reserves in 2019 (BP 2020, 33). These vast deposits have provided a leading position in the global gas exports since the 1980s, with Russian supplies accounted for an average of 20.3% of global exports per annum between 2011 to 2019 (Figure 1.). According to BP's data, there has been no outstanding fluctuation in the Russian share of global exports between 2011 and 2019, with the highest market share detected in 2013 at 21.6% and the lowest in 2016 at 18.9%. Pipeline-based exports have traditionally been centred around Europe, which has purchased an average of 75.3% of total Russian gas exports per year between 2011 and 2019, with the total Russian supply volume increasing from 140 bcm in 2011 to 208 bcm in 2019 (Figure 1). In the corresponding period, Russian export accounted for 34.7% of the average annual European imports. According to BP's statistics, the largest negative swing in the share of Russian gas in European imports was recorded in 2012 with 29.1%, while the largest positive shift occurred in 2017 with 38.7%. All in all, over the examined period, the Russian share of European import markets have increased by an annual average of 5.5%, while European total gas imports grew only by 3.3% per year on average (BP 2012-2020).

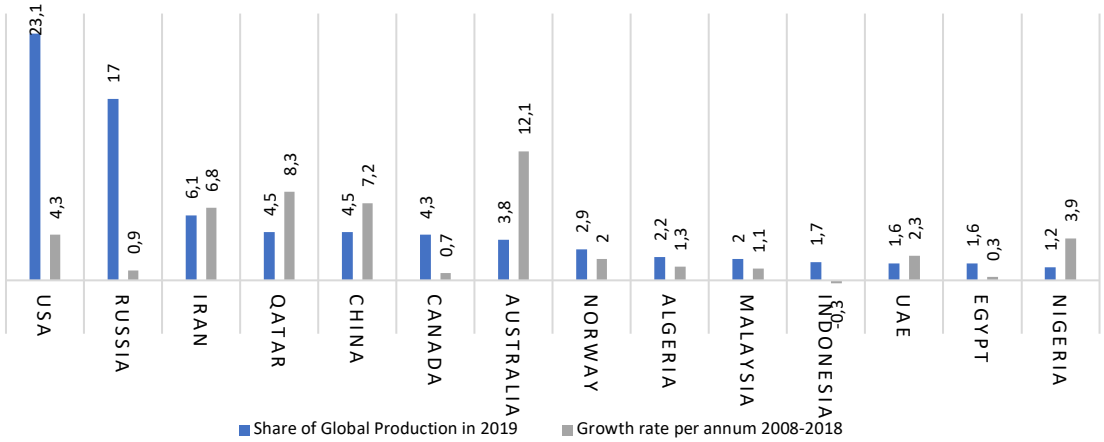
*Figure 1.* Natural Gas Export Volumes – Selected Indicators, 2011-2019 (bcm)




*Author calculations, data source: (BP, 2020; 2019; 2018; 2017; 2016; 2015; 2014; 2013; 2012).*

While modest gains can be viewed as positive developments, the share of Russian gas exports to non-European destinations has been on a declining trend, dropping by around 40% between the years of 2011 and 2019 (Figure 1). One of the factors reducing the share of non-European partners is the recent discovery of large quantities of natural gas in the post-Soviet space, which was a traditional destination of Russian resources. Another reason is the emergence of new competitors. According to Kutcherov et al. (2020, 1), the *"silent revolution of shale gas"* has reshaped the global gas market, leading to the emergence of new competitors, lowering prices and accelerating the formation of new technologies and supply routes. Partly due to shale gas discoveries, the US has not only maintained its leading role in the production industry (Figure 2.) but has become a net exporter. Although Russia has increased its production capacity to respond to growing demand and competition, the 0.9% growth rate between 2008 and 2018 was far below the US rate. In addition, new competitors such as Iran, Canada, Qatar, China and Australia have not only produced a higher growth rate, but also developed effective LNG export technologies (Klare 2017, 35). In this case, Russia is lagging behind its major competitors, despite having increased its LNG capacities by an annual average of 15% between 2011 and 2019 (BP 2020-2012). As an indication of this disparity, in 2019, Russia controlled only 8.1% of global LNG exports, compared to the 22.1% of Qatar, 21.6% of Australia and 9.8% of the US (BP 2019, 42).

*Figure 2.* Market Shares and growth rates in Global Production – Selected Indicators




*Source: BP 2019, 34.*

Supply routes have also begun to change in the recent period due to the shale gas revolution, the spread of LNG, the emergence of new large consumers, diversification policies, and the

destabilisation of traditional transfer regions. One of the most significant developments for Russia is the increasing importance of the Asian market, from which Moscow also wants to gain stakes. However, on the Asian continent, existing partnerships (e.g. US-Asian, Australian-Asian deals), emerging competitors, and the lack of export infrastructure are all hindering Russian efforts. Despite developing pipelines towards China and the Pacific, and using new LNG capacities, Russia still has a weak, though slightly growing, market share in Asia. Between 2011 and 2019, Russia exported an average of 15 bcm of natural gas per year to the Asia-Pacific region, mainly in the form of LNG, with the first pipeline deliveries to China beginning in 2019. Exports to Asia have been characterised by gradually declining supplies to Japan and slowly but steadily increasing exports to China. In sum, Russia's share of the Asian market averaged around 9% during the last decade (BP 2012-2020).

Turning towards the components of systemic clarity, it can be stated that Russia's global gas positions may be reinforced by some ongoing trends, while also can be constrained by certain prevailing threats. When briefly summarizing global *opportunities*, it is again important to emphasize Russia's significant gas reserves, which are larger than the proved quantity and are estimated to peak around 48 tcm (Grigas, 2017, 202). As both energy consumption and gas demand have increased in recent years, the international trends seem to favour countries with such a large deposits. According to BP's statistics, global primary energy consumption grew by 1,6% between 2008 and 2018 (BP 2020, 8). Natural gas has been playing an important role in enabling these higher consumption levels, for example, in 2019, 36% of the additional demand was provided by new natural gas supplies (Global Gas Report 2020, 9). Covering large proportions of consumption growth, the share of gas in primary energy demand have also increased slowly but steadily in the previous decade, representing 21% of total demand in 2010, 22% in 2015 and 23% in 2019 (IEA 2020a). According to calculations of IEA, slow but steady expansion of natural gas will continue in the future with around 1,7% of demand growth between 2019 and 2025 (IEA 2020b).

Among the potential consumers of Russian gas, the Asia-Pacific region has experienced the largest growth with consumption in the region increasing by 4% between 2018 and 2019. Not surprisingly, China was one of the main drivers of demand increase, where consumption grew by 4.4% over the period (BP 2020, 8). Although Europe, the other major target area of Russian export, is projected to decline in primary energy consumption by 13% over the period of 2017–2040, expected production decrease due to the reduction of output capacity in the Netherlands and Norway could still increase total gas import quantities from Russia (Global Gas Report 2020, 10). The Russian positions in Europe and Asia are also reinforced by gas pipelines that are being built or have recently been commissioned. Towards Europe, the two most important pipelines are Turkstream and NordStream 2, with a combined capacity of 70 bcm (Kutcherov et al. 2020, 5). Both of these projects have been surrounded by serious political depates, with Turkish-Russian differences in the case of TurkStream and EU-Russian tensions in the case of NordStream 2. From an economic viewpoint, the gas pipelines being built in Asia are even more important. In December 2019, GAZPROM commissioned the Power of Russia pipeline, a 3,900km long pipeline with a maximum discharge capacity of 61 bcm, which will provide significant export potentials to China (Global Gas Report 2020, 13).

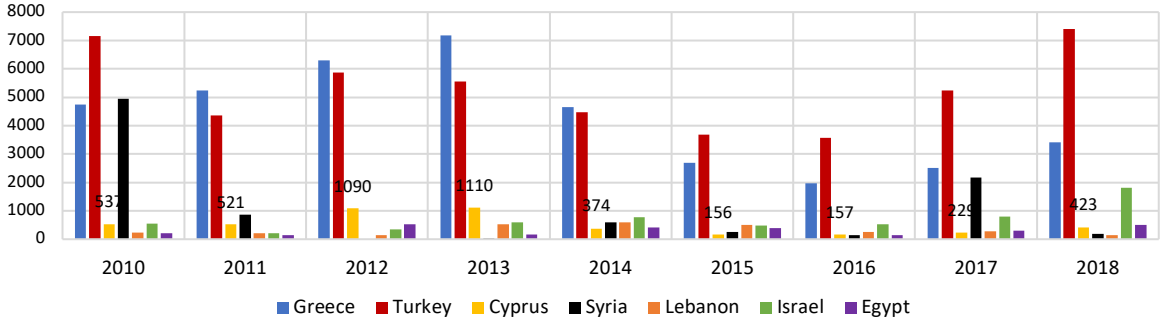
These Russian opportunities are significantly *threat*ened by some global trends and transformations. One of the most important threats is the emergence of new suppliers and newly

discovered gas resources, which are reshaping the market and undermining the position of Russia. As Grigas put it, *"[t]he shifts in gas markets are upsetting the half-century-long status quo of global gas relations and carry profound geopolitical implications"* (Grigas 2017, 10). While its core competitors are still lagging behind Russia, Iran's proven reserves of 32 tcm, Qatar's 24.7 tcm and Turkmenistan's 19.5 tcm indicate that large-scale explorations in recent years are providing more and more opportunities for competitors. Nonetheless, the relative abundance of gas has affected other characteristics of the gas market too: new competitors and new discoveries have pushed prices down and created a gas glut since mid-2010s (BP 2020, 39). This trend affects Moscow particularly negatively, as the share of oil and gas production in the Russian economy has increased from 34.3% in 2010 to 38.9% in 2018 (Franco 2021, 5). Beyond falling public revenues, low prices are also problematic because Russia can only control a relatively small share of the growth in the global gas market. The reason for Moscow's weaker positions is that the growth is not geographically concentrated in area of traditional Russian gas importers, while it is also not particularly related to the pipeline base export industry. On the contrary, the main drivers of growth are North America, Asia and the LNG sector, where Moscow has weaker positions, at least at the moment. Since Europe and pipeline-based exports have been the centrepiece of Russia's gas strategy since the 1960s, Moscow has been slow to respond to these new changes and considered the globalization of gas market as a geopolitical disadvantage. A particularly challenging area is the LNG-based growth in Asia, where the presence of competitors prevents the use of long-term contracts based on political pressure.

### *4.2. Regional level: Russian role in the Eastern Mediterranean gas dynamics*

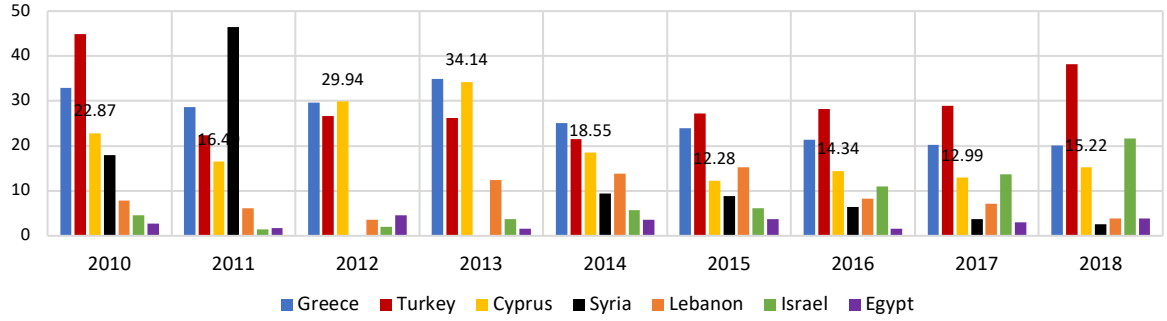
As in the previous section, regional assessment again begins by outlining the characteristics of relative distribution of gas power. Global positions indicate that, despite the intentions to diversify export routes, Europe remained the most important market for Russian gas in the 2010s, albeit the role of alternative regions has begun to increase. This geopolitical situation has placed the Eastern Mediterranean in a unique position, as gas explorations in the region have not only represented a potential competitor for Russia, but also an opportunity to influence emerging rivals aspiring to enter European gas markets. Russian energy exports have traditionally been moderate in the region, at least compared to other destinations. Between 2011-2019, the largest recipient was Turkey, followed by Greece. Both have significant energy consumption, traditionally provided by oil and more recently by gas. While oil imports and shares are included in Figure 3 and 4, it is important to highlight that both countries are also notable importers of natural gas, together purchasing an average of 12% of Russia's total exports in the 2010s (Gazprom 2019; 2020).

*Figure 3.* Value of mineral fuel import from Russia in the Eastern Mediterranean, million USD




*Data source: OEC*

*Figure 4.* Eastern Mediterranean market share of Russia mineral fuel exports, percentage




*Data source: OEC*

Greece has been importing Russian gas since 1996. In the period between 2011-2019, Gazprom supplied a total of 23.1 bcm of natural gas to the country, which was equivalent to 62.8% of the Greek gas consumption. Although the average of 2.5 bcm per year appears to be low compared to Russia's total exports, it is important to note that, for example, the Chinese uptake volume has exceeded this level only once in the corresponding period, in 2019 with 3,7 bcm (BP 2012-2020). For this reason, while Greece cannot be considered one of Russia's most important gas partners, its purchasing power and dependence are certainly significant in regional terms. The gas partnership became particularly important after Russian oil exports to Greece began to drop in 2014, at least partly due to European sanctions against Moscow (Kuznetsov et al. 2017, 28). Although the two countries continued to have close ties, from this period onwards Greece's goal to diversify gas supplies became more and more apparent. With or without European pressure, Athens repeatedly sidelined offers from Russian companies wishing to invest in the privatization of the Greek gas sector. Examples of rejection extend from Sintez bidding for DESFA[4], through Gazprom offering €2 billions for DEPA[5], to ELPE's[6] privatization rules restricting the participation of Russian companies (Taylor 2012; Ekathimerini 2013; EnergyPress 2018). Consequently, the last years of the previous decade were characterized by ambivalent Russian gas positions in the Greek market. Episodic achievements included the TurkStream pipeline beginning to flow Russian gas to Greece in January 2020, and Gazprom signing a long-term supply contract with Mytilineos in June 2020 (Gazprom Information Directorate 2020; Tsolova 2020). Nevertheless, the impact of these agreements is greatly reduced by the opening of Gas Interconnector Greece–Bulgaria in 2020 and the development of LNG terminal in Alexandroupolis, both will allow Greece to channel significant amount of alternative gas resources (Dimitrov 2020; The Sofia Globe 2020).

Russian gas positions in Turkey, at least for the moment, seem more ideal. Taking 2011-2019 data, Turkey is by far the most important regional partner for Russian gas interests. During the period, Turkey purchased an average of 11.5% of total Russian gas exports, which amounted to an average of 23.2 bcm of gas per year. This volume accounted for 55.7% of all Turkish consumption, with a higher dependence at the beginning of the period (2011: 62.2 bcm; 2012: 62.4 bcm) and a much lower at the end (2019: 35.6 bcm) (BP 2012-2020). Preliminary calculations estimate that dependency has continued to fall in 2020, with around 33% of total supplies coming from Russian sources in that year (Khan, 2020). Turkey, apart from being a significant importer of Russian oil and contracting ROSATOM to build the Akkuyu nuclear power plant, is also a crucial transit route

[4] Public Gas Transmission System Operator
[5] Public Gas Corporation of Greece
[6] Hellenic Petroleum

(Winrow, 2017). Among the gas pipelines heading to Turkey, Blue Stream and Turk Stream deliver Russian gas with a current capacity of 31.75 bcm/year. The capacity could theoretically cover about 70% of Turkey's annual average consumption (45.3 bcm). In practice, however, this amount will not be realized, as Turk Stream will also supply gas to the countries of the Balkans and Central Europe, while Turkey also aims to diversify its supplies and does not seek to maximize the Russian potential. In this respect, Ankara's options are enhanced by the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum Pipeline, which was opened in 2006 with a capacity of 25 bcm/year, the Trans-Anatolian Gas Pipeline operating since 2018 with a current capacity of 16 bcm, and the Tabriz-Ankara Pipeline, which was inaugurated in 2001 with a maximum volume of 14 bcm/year. In addition to pipelines, growing LNG capacity also reduces the potential of Russian gas influence. Currently three LNG terminals and floating units contribute to Turkey's gas diversification, whose role is illustrated by the fact that in 2019, Turkey imported 12.9 bcm LNG that was equivalent to 29% of its annual consumption (BP 2020, 41).

In the absence of direct pipeline links, Russian gas has a much lower market share in the rest of the Eastern Mediterranean. The only significant LNG exports in recent years have been delivered to Egypt, where GAZPROM supplied a total of 6.8 bcm of gas in 2015-2016 (Gazprom 2020, 83). Furthermore, ROSNEFT also provided Egypt with a moderate amount of LNG purchased from international markets (Kazmin 2016; Soldatkin 2017). In addition to exploiting commercial opportunities, Russia has been also focusing on newly discovered gas fields. Russian efforts in this regard succeeded in December 2016, when ENI sold its 30% stake of the Shourouk Concession, which contains the giant Zohr gas field, to ROSNEFT (ElBassoussy 2018, 80). As ROSNEFT also owns 10% of the operating company, the Russian share can be considered significant in the concession, especially when taking into account that the Zohr field has already provided 68 mcm daily output in August 2019 (Kiselyova & Soldatkin 2019).

Although with much less success, Russian companies have also shown interest in Israeli gas developments. This has been based on a close oil trade partnership that peaked around 2006 when Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States supplied about 88% of Israel's oil imports (Nurieva 2017, 112). As illustrated in Figures 3 and 4, the level of Israeli oil dependency declined significantly over the following decade, but the newly discovered gas fields such as the Tamar and the Leviathan still presented opportunities for Russian companies. GAZPROM first targeted the Tamar field and sought to acquire shares in Isramco, which owns 28.7% of the gas field (Yeshayahou 2011). After unsuccessful attempts with Tamar, GAZPROM turned towards the Leviathan gas field and attempted to secure shares in the production sector that was being developed in the area. Although President Vladimir Putin himself lobbied for the involvement of the Russian gas giant, the tender was eventually awarded to Woodside Energy of Australia in December 2012 (Baev 2013: 43). Although the Russians have not been successful in the field of production, Gazprom Marketing & Trading Switzerland, the Swiss subsidiary of GAZPROM, has successfully signed a long-term LNG purchase and sales contract in February 2013. The agreement allows the Russians to acquire 4.2 bcm of LNG per year from the Tamar field and distribute it on the Asian markets (Nurieva 2017, 116).

The limited Russian performance in Israel has been largely associated with Moscow's gains in Syria and Lebanon, as neither Tel Aviv nor its Western allies have been interested in supporting regional Russian advances by granting shares in the Israeli gas sector. Moscow's assistance to Bashar Al-Assad in the Syrian civil war was at least partly compensated in December 2013 when

Syria has granted Soyuzneftegaz a 25-year concession to a 2190 km$^2$ area within its EEZ. Although the Russian company dropped its plans for offshore oil and gas exploration in Syria due to security reasons, in 2017 Damascus granted exclusive exploration and production rights for Russia in Syrian territories (Koduvayur and Everett 2019). Equipped with such comfortable positions, Russian-led exploration and/or production is scheduled to begin in 2023, with relatively high expectations for finding potential offshore gas fields (Salameh and Chedid 2020, 3). Besides potential explorations and proved Syrian reserves, the country's transit position is also crucial for Moscow. From a Russian point of view, the channelling of Persian Gulf gas, mainly from Qatar, to Turkish and thus European markets could be a threat, which may be and should be prevented by controlling Syria (Koduvayur and Everett 2019).

The Russian presence in Syria is a rather effective steppingstone towards the slowly, but currently evolving Lebanese gas sector. The interconnection of Russian interests related to both countries is demonstrated by Moscow's offer in June 2019 to mediate the Lebanese-Syrian maritime dispute, which could block future efforts of exploitations. Russian concerns are linked not only to Syrian but also to Lebanese gas positions: After a long and postponed tendering procedure, the Lebanese government awarded two exclusive petroleum licenses for exploration and production for the consortium of TOTAL, ENI and NOVATEK in December 2017. Although the decision favoured mostly the French and Italian companies, NOVATEK still owns 20% of shares (Salameh and Chedid, 2020). Russian companies are also expected to participate in the next licensing rounds, while also trying to obtain stakes in the construction and operation of developing gas infrastructure. ROSNEFT, for example, has reportedly competed in a public tender to operate a floating storage and regasification units that first supposed to ease electricity shortages, and then would be used to transform and utilize domestic offshore resources (Rose and Brown 2019). Similar Russian moves were detected in the oil sector as well. In 2019, for instance, ROSNEFT signed an agreement to operate and expand Tripoli's oil storage tanks for 20 years (Salameh and Chedid 2020, 3). The agreement is believed to be linked to regional Russian plans and more precisely to an old oil pipeline between Kirkuk and Tripoli, the rehabilitation of which would allow free passage of oil extracted by ROSNEFT in Iraq (Rose and Brown 2019).

After outlining the characteristics of relative distribution of power, it is again necessary to briefly analyse the opportunities and threats that positively or negatively affect Russia's position in the region. Before discussing these, it can be said that Russia's gas positions in the region are the result of geopolitical reconfigurations that have taken place in recent years. In this transformation, Russia has been confronted with a volatile region where the interests of several great and regional powers clash, and where individual states have different deterrent capabilities. Regardless of the countries, Moscow's motives were dictated by the need to maintain its gas position in Europe, or as Stergiou put it, *"Moscow tried to undertake pre-emptive action against everything that can undermine its hegemonic position as energy-provider to the European Markets and to the countries of the Eastern Mediterranean"* (Stergiou 2017, 106). These efforts have produced mixed results, but they have undoubtedly made Russia one of the most important outside powers in the Eastern Mediterranean. For Moscow, the two most important countries in the region are Syria and Turkey, the former mainly for geopolitical and military reasons, the latter mainly for economic and energy considerations. In addition, both countries are important for geographical reasons, as they are positioned to block Europe's diversification efforts involving sources in the Caucasus, Central Asia, and the Middle East.

Russia's central interest in preserving or enhancing its European and regional gas positions has also influenced its attitude towards the gas explorations in the Eastern Mediterranean. In this case, the *opportunities* are mainly linked to the emerging gas market, as Russia can intervene as a global player and take a significant slice of regional developments. The policy of involvement can be observed in almost all countries in the region, although Russian gas influence has larger impacts mainly in Greece, Turkey, Syria, Lebanon and Egypt. In these cases, developing gas industry and infrastructure have provided several involvement potentials scaling from technical tenders to business and financial opportunities. With such gains, and by using the Russian stronghold of Syria, Moscow is able to influence regional gas developments, and may counterbalance the interests of its competitors. As the examples of small countries in Central and Northern Europe demonstrate, Russia can also influence smaller states in the region and may develop political leverage by affecting or controlling gas developments.

*Table 1. Offshore gas fields and discoveries in the Eastern Mediterranean*

| Country | Gas field | Discovered quantities (bcm) |
|---|---|---|
| Egypt | Zohr | 849.5 |
| | West Nile Delta | 141.5 |
| | Nour | 56.6 |
| | Nooros | 56.6 |
| | Atoll | 42.4 |
| | Baltim | 19.8 |
| Israel | Leviathan | 622.9 |
| | Tamar | 305.8 |
| | Tanin | 36.8 |
| | Karish | 28.3 |
| | Mari-B | 28.3 |
| | Noa | 5.6 |
| Palestine | Gaza Marine | 28.3 |
| Cyprus | Aphrodite | ~141.5 |
| | Calypso | ~181.2 |
| | Glaucus | ~141.5 |
| Greece | Talos | ~283.1 |
| Libya | Bouri | 99.1 |
| Turkey | Sakarya | 320 |

*Source: Bowlus, 2020, supplemented by the author.*

In the case of the regional context, it is again important to distinguish between current and future threats. Assessing the current situation, it can be argued that the global significance of Eastern Mediterranean gas discoveries lags far behind its regional importance. Based on 2019 data, combined Eastern Mediterranean gas discoveries, including estimated ones (Table 1.), would represent fairly about ~1.6% of total global reserves, compared to Russian proved reserves which make up around 19.1% of global reserves (BP 2020, 32). With this volume, gas discoveries in the Eastern Mediterranean could mostly threaten Russia's regional supplies and, despite the Cypriot, Israeli or Lebanese dreams, they would be less competitive in the European market. The risk of losing Russia's regional position is also reduced by the fact that Turkey, Russia's largest gas partner in the area, has strained relations with most potential suppliers in the region, including Israel, Egypt and Cyprus. While this may change in the future, especially in the Israeli and Egyptian context, Russia's influential presence in Syria could easily prevent the establishment of onshore or offshore gas connections towards Turkey.

Whereas the current situation poses relatively few *threats*, the future is much more problematic from a Russian perspective. According to estimations, the combined reserves of the Levant (3455.04 bcm), the Nile Delta (6315.36 bcm) and Herodotus (~3455.04 bcm) basins contain at least 13 225 bcm of recoverable undiscovered gas, which would represent approximately 6.6% of global resources in 2019 (USGS 2010a; USGS 2010b; Elia et al. 2016). It is indicative that, based on average data for 2011-2019, this volume would provide the EU total gas imports (480 bcm/year) for about 27 years, and would cover the average volume of gas exported by Russia (167 bcm/year between 2011-2019) to the EU for around 79 years (BP 2012-2020). While it is not seriously viable to consider export volumes for undiscovered quantities, these purely mathematical calculations demonstrate possible threats to Russian positions and underline the risks of establishing an alternative Eastern Mediterranean supply route to Europe.

## 5. Unit Level

At the unit level, the paper analyses intervening variables that influenced Russian decisions on gas developments in Cyprus. Among these, the factors of *strategic culture, leader images*, *state-society relations*, and *domestic institutions* have been selected. In each case, only the Russian perspective is emphasised.

### *5.1. Strategic Culture*

Cyprus's strategic location has attracted Russian attention for decades. The beginnings of bilateral partnership dates back to the 1960s, when Moscow has established close diplomatic, cultural and economic relations with the Greek Cypriots. After the island gained independence, Moscow endorsed the maintenance of an independent and demilitarised Cypriot state and considered any political or military forms of Greek and Turkish presence on the island as attempts to secure a permanent NATO-base in the strategically significant Eastern Mediterranean (Stergiou, 2007: 88-92). Consequently, the Soviet Union supported the original concept of RoC, favoured the Zurich agreements and the constitution of 1960, and denounced Greek efforts to annex (Enosis) or Turkish policies to divide the island (Taksim). Furthermore, the Soviet Union preferred a non-aligned and weak Cyprus where popular leftist policies and Greek-Turkish disputes could be exploited for gaining influence and undermining Western interests. This scheme provided a loose but long-standing framework for Moscow's Cyprus policies and defined its reactions during the bicommunal troubles of 1963-1964, 1967, 1974 or 1983. Official statements on these emergencies usually urged the protections of territorial integrity and national independence, supported elected leaders, condemned external interventions, and denounced attempts to expand NATO's influence over the island (Sakkas and Zhukova 2013: 125-126; 132). This policy created an ambivalent position in which Moscow aimed to maintain Greek-Turkish disputes but tried to avoid escalations of the Cyprus conflict that would allow even further Western expansion in the island.

After close political connections during the Cold War, bilateral cooperation slowly but steadily expanded during the 1990s when Moscow and Nicosia have developed a multichannel partnership based on dynamic diplomatic, economic and cultural ties. One of the driving forces of flourishing diplomatic relations was the protracted division of Cyprus, in which Russia usually adopted the rhetoric of Greek Cypriots and provided political support for them, particularly in the UN Security Council. Russia's view in protecting legal frameworks has also extended to other areas: Moscow has upheld compliance with UN conventions on the law of the sea, thus supporting the interests of Nicosia in the Eastern Mediterranean maritime disputes. In return, the Republic

of Cyprus has proved to be tolerant towards Moscow's controversial foreign policy actions and was often accused of representing Russian interests in the EU. In addition, Western concerns have also been related to defence politics and particularly to the continuing pressures on Greek Cypriots to allow the establishment of Russian military presence or installations on the island. Although Nicosia has rejected these requests, Moscow has secured an anchoring deal that let Russian navy vessels to refuel and resupply at Greek Cypriot ports (Stergiou 2019, 62).

These historical and contemporary dynamics outline the Russian strategic culture towards Cyprus. Both the Soviet Union and the Russian Federation viewed (and views) the island as an area of strategic importance, enabling them to counterbalance NATO interests in the region and promote Moscow's influence in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East (Maslova et al. 2019, 200). Russia has therefore seen the island as a "strategic cake" from which the Western (British, American) and regional (Greek, Turkish) powers had already taken their slice in the 1960s and 1970s, and therefore, to maintain the regional balance of power, Russia has also a right to claim its share. Over the past decades, Russia has sought to legitimize this ambition in a number of ways, including seeking to become an official party of Cypriot peace negotiations or, like the UK, claiming basing areas. As the Western powers have categorically rejected a *de jure* representation in all cases, Russia has established a *de facto* sphere of influence. During the Cold War, this was mainly linked to the communist AKEL, while in the early 2000s it slowly spread to the banking and financial sector. This growing influence has been reinforced twice in the 21st century, in 2004 and 2011. In 2004, when the Republic of Cyprus became a member of the EU and thus provided Russia with a relatively weak link to exert its influence. And in 2011, when the outbreak of the Syrian civil war was accompanied by the discovery of natural gas in the Cypriot EEZ, which naturally caught the attention of Russian strategists.

Although this enhanced importance has been maintained, and the Russian dominance in Cyprus continues to grow, it is crucial to underline that Moscow does not overestimate the significance of the island. As highlighted earlier, for Moscow, Turkey and Syria are the most important regional actors, and therefore it subordinates its interests in Cyprus to them. This can be seen, on the one hand, in the attitude towards the Cyprus conflict, in which Russia supports the Greek Cypriots rhetorically, but in practice it does not go against Turkish interests. On the other hand, it is also evident in Russia's attitude towards Cypriot gas developments, in which Moscow does not seek to oppose either Turkish or its own interests. To sum up, Russia's strategy in Cyprus reflects Moscow's global and regional strategy and is based on maintaining (or establishing) the balance of power and enhancing multipolarity. Moscow is therefore consciously trying to limit the extent of its slowly expanding interference in Cyprus, while at the same time using violent rhetoric if the balance of power in Cyprus is threatened. The latter was demonstrated in December 2018, when Russia publicly warned the Greek Cypriot government and threatened to retaliate if a US military base was established on the island (Osborn 2018).

*5.2. Leader images*

As the strategies of Russia's vital policy areas are firmly centralized, it is reasonable to claim that the previous section reflects the Russian leaders' perceptions towards Cyprus. Russian presidents have traditionally maintained good relations with Greek Cypriot counterparts, largely due to the common Orthodox heritage and the fact that some of the Greek Cypriot leaders were educated in Russia or the Eastern Bloc. This attitude is reflected in the highest level of official visits, with Russian and Greek Cypriot presidents meeting 13 times between 1991 and 2019 (Krasnov et al.

2019, 246-248). Although this is less than the frequency of EU summits involving Greek Cypriot leaders, it is much more than the number of meetings between the US and Cyprus presidents, in this case the last official working visit to the White House was in 1996. Moscow's greater interests indicate that Russian leaders attach considerable importance to developments in Cyprus.

However, this importance is clearly limited and selective. Statements by President Putin and Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov indicate that Russian leaders have three particularly important themes in relation to Cyprus: multilateralism and strengthening the role of the UN in maintaining stability and peace; supporting basic principles of international law; and further enhancing of economic relations (Gotev 2015; Christou 2020; Orthodox Times 2020a; TASS 2020). While the selective application of these issues is itself indicative, it is important to note that Russia does not necessarily support Greek Cypriot positions on these three issues either. This became evident in September 2020, when President Anastasiades asked Russian assistance in the maritime disputes with Turkey, and though Moscow offered mediation, it did not support the Greek Cypriot maximalist position, rather promoting the search for compromise. As Foreign Minister Lavrov put it, *"finding compromises, finding a balance of interests is the only way to solve different problems in different parts (of the world)*" (Orthodox Times 2020a).

Such statements indicate two important perceptions of Russian leaders. First, that they are maintaining their global narrative with regard to Cyprus, and, in the name of multipolarity, they seek to practice the strategy of balance of power. Second, that Russian leaders are essentially tying their Cyprus strategy to Turkey, i.e., subordinating support for their Greek Cypriot friends to Russian interests in Turkey. In the minds of Moscow's leaders, the most important element of Greek Cypriot-Russian relations is therefore not the settlement of the Cyprus conflict or the emergence of Greek Cypriot gas production, which may be competition for Russia and a red flag for Turkey, but the deepening of economic, especially financial relations, which already provided significant benefits for Russians (Baev 2014, 41).

*5.3. State-society relations*

In this section, the paper outlines some notable societal factors that may reinforce or hinder Russian strategies towards Cyprus. As indicated above, pluralist influences play little role in the centralised Russian foreign policymaking. Nevertheless, there are few social factors that have an impact on Cyprus related Russian policymaking. One of the most important of these is the Russian diaspora living in Cyprus, which grew in strength and numbers mainly after the Cold War. The community is estimated to have reached 40,000-50,000 permanent residents by 2018, thus constituting about 5-6% of the population. The diaspora's central city is Limassol, where Russians have established their own schools, radio stations, newspapers, and associations. The community have also developed its own political party in 2017. The party, called *Me the Citizen*, aims to secure positions in national and European elections (Stergiou 2019, 58).

*Table 2.* Arrivals of Russian Tourists to Cyprus, 2010-2018,

| | **2010** | **2011** | **2012** | **2013** | **2014** | **2015** | **2016** | **2017** | **2018** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Number of Russian tourists (thousands) | 224 | 334 | 474 | 609 | 637 | 525 | 782 | 824 | 784 |
| Share of Russia in total | 10% | 14% | 19% | 25% | 26% | 20% | 25% | 23% | 20% |

*Source: Zavyalova et al. 2019, 143.*

Tourism is another key area of state-society relations. Cyprus is a popular tourist destination among Russian holidaymakers who represented about 25% of total tourist arrivals to RoC in 2016, 23% in 2017, and 20% in 2018 (Zavyalova et al. 2019, 143). According to estimations, Russian tourists spent an average of €800 million per year during the 2010s, thus providing significant income for the Greek Cypriot tourist industry (CSD 2019). While Russian tourists certainly have less influence on foreign policy decisions, the impact of 2015 jet incident between Turkey and Russia, and the consequent sanctions and bans imposed by Moscow are good indications of the political potentials of tourism withdrawal.

In addition to the pleasant Mediterranean climate, both Russian expats and tourists feel comfortable in Cyprus because of the Orthodox cultural similarities. The Russian and Cypriot Orthodox churches have traditionally maintained an excellent relationship, and Moscow had already exploited the Orthodox popularity of Archbishop Makarios and the religious devotion of Greek Cypriots during the Cold War. Cordial relations have continued after the Cold War, as the Church of Cyprus has not only maintained considerable political and opinion-forming capacities in the south of the island, but also kept its large economic influence. This ideal situation for Moscow was disrupted by the events of Ukrainian conflict in 2014, and particularly by the Orthodox schism in 2018. In the dispute between the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople and the Russian Orthodox Church over the future of Ukrainian Orthodox Church, the Church of Cyprus eventually declared its support for the Holy Synod confirming its intentions to grant autocephaly to the Eastern Orthodox church in Ukraine (Orthodox Times 2020b). The split will undoubtedly affect the diplomatic levels and indicates that while Moscow maintains full control over the Russian Orthodox Church, the Cypriot government is unable to dominate the Church of Cyprus, which has its own political and economic agenda and extensive popularity to support it.

*5.4. Domestic institutions*

When analysing the Russian influence in Cyprus, two domestic institutions are particularly relevant, namely the financial and the energy sector. The Russian financial sector has traditionally viewed the island as a key financial destination, but this attitude has not disappeared after the 2013-2014 Greek Cypriot financial crisis and the abolition of offshore opportunities. Consequently, Russia maintained significant influence in the banking, real estate and tourism sector. Due to offshore financial opportunities and vague regulations, banking and corporate services particularly boomed since the early 2000s, peaking around 2012-2013 when Moody's estimated the accumulation of Russian assets in Cyprus around $31 billion (Vogler & Thompson, 2015). Although the Greek Cypriot economic crisis (2013-2014) and conditions of the European troika's €10 billion bailout attempted to end offshore opportunities, Russian financial influence has not only prevailed but became more prominent in the past years. According to the Center for the Study of Democracy, by the end of 2018, Russian companies had invested more than €45.1 billion in Cyprus, which totalled 12.4% of the total foreign direct investment in the country, or around 230% of the country's GDP that year (CSD 2019, 67). Financial machinations in Cyprus by Russians were also reflected in the official figures. Between 2010 and 2018, direct investments from Cyprus to Russia averaged around $150 billion/year, representing an average of 32% of total foreign investments in Russia in the corresponding period (Zavyalova et al. 2019, 143).

Besides financial services, the real estate industry has also experienced a major boom due to Russian investments related to the recently terminated (2020) "golden visa" programme. Between 2013 and 2017, the programme sold 3336 EU citizenship to mainly Russian, Chinese and

Middle Eastern citizens who were required to invest €500,000 in property purchase and €2 million in a national development fund, Cypriot companies or government bonds (Brillaud and Martini 2018, 24).

With such a significant footprint, Russia has become the largest economic player in Cyprus, maintaining a major influence on strategic sectors and industries (CSD 2019). Besides the financial sector, another traditionally lucrative business was energy, as electricity generation in Cyprus is oil-based, with Russian sources playing a prominent role. Cyprus has traditionally been in the TOP 3 in terms of regional dependence on Russian mineral fuel supplies, with an average of 19.6% of its resources originating in Russia over the period of 2010-2018 (Figure 4). This comfortable situation has been changed by the discovery of gas fields in Cyprus, which is unfavourable to Russian energy interests. The changes are indicated by the fact that, due to European and US participation in Greek Cypriot gas developments and EU sanctions against Moscow, imports of Russian mineral fuels to RoC have decreased since 2014, averaging around 13.7% between 2015 and 2018. While these losses will not knock out Russia's oil companies, they do signal that regional buyers may slowly but steadily switch to domestic gas resources. Due to these developments, the Russian energy sector is presented with two possible stretegic choices regarding gas discoveries in Cyprus. The first is that Moscow gains influence in the Greek Cypriot gas industry by exploiting Russia's dominant position in Cyprus, thereby obtaining financial and political capital, though undermining its own energy priorities and confronting Turkish interests. The second is that Russia distances itself from the gas developments in Cyprus and tries to hinder their progress while maintaining its secure economic and political position on the island. In terms of foreign policy choices, Russian leaders unsurprisingly selected the second option, prioritising energy and strategic interests over potential power maximisation in Cyprus.

## 6. Foreign Policy Outcomes and Discussion

The independent (systemic) and intervening (unit) variables outlined above have determined foreign policy outcomes (dependent variables) and defined Russian decisions over Greek Cypriot gas opportunities. These systemic and entity-level features contoured a particularly complex situation in which Russia's global and regional interests, as well as the concerns of certain unit-level factors, limited Moscow's ability to engage in the gas developments of Cyprus. Table 3 briefly summarises these developments and outlines some of the main Russian-related activities that have taken place since the discovery of gas in Cyprus.

*Table 3.* Key events linked to Russia in the gas developments of Cyprus

| Event | Year |
|---|---|
| Cyprus completes its first licencing round – No Russian bid | 2007 |
| Russian navy nears gas drilling zone in the Cyprus EEZ | 2011 |
| Discovery of Aphrodite gas field by Nobel Energy in Block 12 | 2011 |
| President Demetris Christofias expressed hopes that Russian companies would decide to participate in the second licensing round of Cyprus. | 2012 |
| Turkey warns it will shun firms involved in Cyprus oil, gas drilling | 2012 |
| Gazprom did not bid in the RoC's 2012 bid due to high production costs. | 2012 |
| Cyprus completes its second licencing round: Nicosia decided to award Consortium led by Total from France with Novatek and GPB Global Resources from Russia, for the Block 9. | 2012 |
| The Greek Cypriot government announced its decision to end talks with the French-Russian consortium over licencing rights of Block 9, choosing instead to start negotiations ENI-KOGAS. | 2012 |

| | |
|---|---|
| Greek Cypriot Parliamentary delegation arrived in Moscow: Russia has a strategic interest in the energy developments in the Eastern Mediterranean region. | 2013 |
| Itera owned by Rosneft attempts to negotiate with Cyprus Public Gas Company (DEFA) to supply gas for electricity production. Negotiations fail. | 2013 |
| Gazprom proposed to undertake the financial restructuring of the Cyprus banks in exchange for exploration rights. | 2013 |
| Cyprus' third licensing-round for blocks 6, 8 and 10 – No Russian bid | 2016 |
| Discovery of Calypso gas field by ENI in Block 6 | 2017 |
| Russia warns Cyprus against allowing U.S. military to deployment there | 2018 |
| Discovery of Glaucus gas field by Exxon Mobil and Qatar Petroleum in Block 10 | 2019 |
| Three consortia running for Cyprus LNG terminal construction – No Russian bid | 2019 |
| NOVATEK bid for supplying LNG to Cyprus | 2019 |
| Eni and Total have postponed exploratory drilling in Cyprus until next year due to COVID19 | |
| Anastasiades calls Putin to help ease gas search tensions with Turkey | 2020 |

*Source: CyprusMail archive database, own selections.*

The table reveals that Russia was seeking to gain a more prominent position in the emerging gas exploration process mainly before 2014, i.e., before the events in Ukraine. During this period, NOVATEK and ROSNEFT showed greater interests, though neither managed to take positions. The absence of state-owned GAZPROM is certainly indicative, as is the fact that from the outset of explorations Ankara has warned energy companies operating in Turkey by threatening to expel them in the event of taking part in the Greek Cypriot gas developments. The fact that during the financial crisis of Cyprus, GAZPROM had tried to obtain a drilling license is an indication of the deterioration of Turkish-Russian relations, though the attempt cannot be considered as a long-term strategic goal. On the contrary, GAZPROM remained distant from the gas development in Cyprus and allowed other Russian companies to participate in licencing rounds. This behaviour demonstrates that Russia was pursuing a structural neorealist approach to the gas opportunities in Cyprus until 2014, and while GAZPROM's absence attempted to appease Ankara, Moscow sought to maximise its power potential on the island through other companies. During this period, Russia followed the same tactics in Cyprus as in other regional states and tried to gain similar advantages as in Egypt or Lebanon.

While before 2014 Russia had been trying to take its share from the gas cake of Cyprus, after 2014 it abandoned its balancing strategy. From this period onwards, Moscow distanced itself from all major opportunities and concentrated on consolidating its dominant role in the economic sector. It is important to note that Russia remained active in other countries in the region during this period: ROSNEFT secured 30% stake of Egyptian Zohr gas field in December 2016; Total, Eni and NOVATEK consortium obtained two Lebanese licenses for exploration and production in December 2017; while in same period Damascus granted exclusive exploration and production rights for Russia in Syrian territories. Perhaps more importantly GAZPROM has received Ankara's permission to construct TurkStream Line 1 in 2016 and TurkStream Line 2 in 2018 (Pinchuk 2016; The Maritime Executive 2018).

These activities indicate that the Russian strategy of gaining energy positions based on classical realist logic has only changed in the case of Cyprus. The findings of this study suggest that this outcome may have occurred due to the following reasons:

- From 2014 onwards, the deteriorating Russian-EU relations and the uncertain fate of NordStream 2 have made the construction of TurkStream increasingly important for Russia. For this reason, Moscow was reluctant to oppose Ankara's ambitions in Cyprus and deliberately distanced itself from the otherwise low-profit Greek Cypriot gas opportunities.
- Russia has been considering its national and corporate energy interests and has not intended to assist and support the emergence of potential competitors.
- For these reasons, Russia has not particularly protested when its companies have been sidelined in licensing tenders and, despite its heavy political and economic dominance on the island, has not clashed with the EU member RoC to involve Russian gas interests.

These reasons enable to test the hypothesis which, contrary to the classical realist logic, stated that the absence of Russian involvement in the Greek Cypriot gas developments is the result of the intervening variables of domestic units. More precisely, the hypothesis argued that *the otherwise predictable Russian involvement was constrained by domestic variables that limited gas cooperation on both the Russian and Greek Cypriot sides*. The analysis has shown that, while systemic reasons also played a part, Russia's strategic choice to limit the accumulation of power in Cyprus through securing stakes in the gas sector was based on the interests of unit-level variables. Among these interests, three are worth emphasising. Russia's *economic positions* in Cyprus are considerably dominant, providing significant political opportunities. Moscow intends to preserve these economic positions, thus, in accordance with its *strategic culture* based on the balance of power concept, seeks to limit its penetration to sectors dominated by other significant actors of the Cyprus equilibrium. This attitude, however, has not been the result of a liberal theory-based cooperative attitude, rather a desire to safeguard Russia's economic positions in Cyprus and protect the interests of Russian *gas corporations*. These corporations would have been able to gain important stakes in the gas developments of Cyprus and thus hold major economic and political positions in an EU member state. However, the possibilities offered by Turkey far outweighed these potentials and reduced the relative value of Cypriot gas opportunities. The study thus proved the hypothesis and demonstrated that at least three of the intervening unit-level variables acted against the implementation of classical realist logic. Understanding the *leader images* has also assisted in interpreting interests of unit-level categories, however, in this study, the identification of *state-society relations* has proved to be less relevant. Lastly, the analysis has not only demonstrated the analytical potentials of neoclassical realism, but also showed that it has the ability to comprehend international politics as a mature theory of IR.

**Conclusion**

The paper applied the theory and analytical framework of neoclassical realism to the interpretation of Russian gas interests in Cyprus. It asked the question of why Russia is not involved in the gas opportunities currently being developed in Cyprus, despite its considerable economic and political influence on the island. In accordance with the framework of neoclassical realist theory, the study examined systemic and unit-level characteristics and interpreted them in the context of foreign policy outcomes. The study has demonstrated that unit-level intervening variables have played a major role in the Russian absence as they sacrificed Moscow’s potentials in the Cypriot gas developments in favour of Turkish energy prospects and their own market aspirations. It is important to point out, however, that if the interests of intervening variables change then the foreign policy outcome may also be altered, i.e., Russia may become interested in participating in the Greek Cypriot gas business.

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