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The ExxonMobil Deal and Türkiye's Global Gas Trading Center Plan

Perspectives Papers / By Dr. Frank Musmar and Dr. Bekir Atacan

Cooperation in the energy field between the E.U. and Turkey has been recognized as an essential pillar of their relations. Moreover, the European Union sees energy sources in the Eastern Mediterranean as an alternative to Russian gas imports, but there is a long way to go before the region becomes an energy hub. Even in an ideal scenario of diversification of gas sources for the E.U. and Turkey, a notable degree of dependency on Russia would remain due to scale. Even though the creation of the new energy forum and the increased exploration of resources are good signs, there are still many obstacles related to the extraction of the gas, its transport to the markets, and infrastructure.

Ultimately, the natural resources in the Eastern Mediterranean will have profound implications for the regional geopolitical and economic equilibrium. In a region already ravaged by several conflicts, new tensions over resources are bad news not only for the countries there but also for the whole of Europe, from the point of view of energy security and security in general. Without a comprehensive and coordinated approach by the E.U. and the parties concerned, conflicts will continue to undermine all efforts to promote peace and economic development.

Russia – Turkey Gas Hub

In October 2022, Russian President Vladimir Putin proposed establishing a gas center in Turkey to export gas to Europe. An analysis in the Global LNG Hub bulletin, which specializes in liquefied natural gas trade, believes that the potential liquefied natural gas deal between Turkey and **ExxonMobil** to import 2.5 million tons annually will have no impact on Turkey's share of the Russian gas market. The Turkish government hopes establishing a gas hub will place



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Turkey at the heart of a complex route that will link its resource-rich neighbors in the East with European markets in the West by liquefying it in its facilities, moreover ensuring Turkey's consumption of natural gas, which amounts to approximately 53.5 billion cubic meters annually. In comparison, it produces only approximately 380 million cubic meters annually.

According to the U.S. Energy Information Administration, in 2022, Russia accounted for 39% of Turkey's natural gas imports, followed by Iran (17%), Azerbaijan (16%), and the United States (10%). To a lesser extent, Türkiye imports liquefied natural gas from Algeria, Nigeria, Qatar, and the United States. The share of Russian gas from Turkish imports reached 59.14% last year, 2023. Russia also has extensive energy cooperation with Turkey, which is building a nuclear power station to generate electricity. Russia also postponed the payment of its dues to Turkey in exchange for natural gas in 2023, which helped Ankara face economic problems.

The ExxonMobil Deal

Turkey is in talks with ExxonMobil to sign a new deal to supply liquefied natural gas that would allow it to reduce its dependence on Russian gas. ExxonMobil's 10-year contract will reduce the amount of uncontracted LNG in the market, which usually increases the cost of natural gas in the spot market. Through this contract, Türkiye works to avoid fluctuations in natural gas prices in the spot market. Every time a long-term contract for LNG is signed, there will be a smaller amount of LNG that Ankara needs to buy from the spot market, which leads to lower volatility, primarily since natural gas is sold in dollars, which Ankara has been suffering from a scarcity in recent years. Ankara is seeking a "new supply portfolio," the potential deal with the major American energy company would secure up to 2.5 million tons of liquefied natural gas annually under a long-term contract, which could last up to 10 years. The agreement will not significantly impact Russia's current role as the largest gas supplier to Turkey. The quantities that can be secured in a future



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deal with ExxonMobil represent only a tiny portion of Russian gas shipments to Turkey. It also believes that Turkey's interest in the deal is linked to its close relationship with Qatar, which is ExxonMobil's partner in the Golden Pass LNG project, a project that should supply Turkey with liquefied natural gas

Türkiye Currnrt Energy Trade Overview (2022)

- Türkiye's total electricity imports totaled 2.3 kWh, and exports stood at 4.2 kWh.
- Türkiye imported 72% more crude oil in 2022 than in 2012 from Russia, Iraq, Azerbaijan, and Kazakhstan and exported significant volumes to Türkiye via Pipeline and tanker. Türkiye exported about 55,000 b/d in in 2022.
- Türkiye is a net importer of natural gas, importing 1.9 Tcf and exporting 20.5 Bcf in 2022. Türkiye's natural gas imports came from Russia (39%), Iran (17%), Azerbaijan (16%), and the United States (10%).
- Türkiye exported 40.7 million short tons of coal in 2022. Russia (21.7 million short tons) and Colombia (11.6 million short tons) were the largest importers of coal products from Türkiye in 2022, while the United States was the fourth-largest importer at 1.9 million short tons.
- Türkiye is a net importer of crude oil, liquefied natural gas (LNG), and petroleum products. Seaborne imports consisted of 37% (623,000b/d) crude oil and condensate, 34% (571,000 b/d) clean petroleum products, 4% (70,000 b/d) dirty petroleum products, and 25% (416,900 b/d) LNG while almost all seaborne exports consisted of refined petroleum product (288,000 b/d).
- Russia was the largest source of crude oil, LNG, and petroleum products (60% crude oil and 37% refined oil products) in aggregate to Türkiye, representing 34% of Türkiye's seaborne imports, while the United States accounted for the second-most crude oil, LNG, and petroleum product imports, at 13% of total imports. Of the U.S. imports, 73% were LNG, and 27% were clean petroleum products.
- Türkiye is one of the primary transit countries for pipelines between Europe, Russia, and the Middle East.
- As Russia's flows to Europe have declined since early 2022, Türkiye has become a more important route for oil, and natural gas flows to Europe from Central Asia and the Middle East, primarily via pipelines such as the BTC, TANAP, TAP, and CPC. However, pipelines transporting Russia's natural gas, such as the Turkish



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Stream and Blue Stream, have also gained importance, underscoring Türkiye's role as an international hub for oil and natural gas flows.

Türkiye Current Oil and Natural Gas Pipelines and Projects

One of the main goals of Türkiye's energy strategy is to diversify routes and resources to strengthen its energy supply security. Türkiye also aims to contribute to regional and global energy security and become a regional energy trade center.

1- Filyos Natural-gas Processing Plant

Filyos Natural-gas Processing Plant is a natural-gas processing located at the port of Filyos in Çaycuma district, Zonguldak Province, Turkey. The Plant purifies raw natural gas delivered by submarine pipelines from the offshore platforms on the Sakarya gas field in the Turkish part of the Black Sea. The Plant is connected to the national natural gas pipeline system and processes 3.5 billion cubic meters annually. The Plant was constructed by TPAO and operated by BOTAŞ.

2- Crude Oil Pipelines

A- Kirkuk-Yumurtalık Crude Oil Pipeline (Iraq-Türkiye Crude Oil Pipeline)

The Kirkuk-Ceyhan Oil Pipeline, also known as the Iraq-Turkey Crude Oil Pipeline, is a 600-mile-long (970 km) Pipeline from Kirkuk in Iraq to Ceyhan in Turkey. It is Iraq's most extensive crude oil export line.

B- Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan Crude Oil Pipeline (BTC)

The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan Crude Oil Pipeline Project (BTC) came from an agreement between Turkey, Azerbaijan, and Georgia and was approved by the Turkish government in June 2000. The Pipeline is a 1,768-kilometer-long crude oil pipeline connecting Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan, to Ceyhan via Tbilisi in Georgia.

Natural Gas Pipelines

A- Iran – Türkiye Natural Gas Pipeline

The Tabriz-Ankara pipeline is a 2,577-kilometre (1,601 mi) long natural gas pipeline that runs from Tabriz in northwest Iran to Ankara in Turkey. Construction of the Pipeline began in 1996 after a signed agreement between



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the Turkish and Iranian governments. Under this agreement, Iran would sell natural gas to Turkey for 22 years, beginning in 1999. The Pipeline was commissioned on 26 July 2001 and has been attacked and damaged several times by PKK guerillas 11 times as of August 2020

B- Blue Stream Natural Gas Pipeline

Blue Stream is a major trans-Black Sea gas pipeline that carries natural gas to Turkey from Russia. The Blue Stream Pipeline B.V., a Netherlands-based joint venture between Russian Gazprom and Italian Eni, constructed the Pipeline. The Blue Stream Pipeline B.V. is an owner of the subsea section of the Pipeline, including the Beregovaya compressor station, while Gazprom owns and operates the Russian land section of the Pipeline, and the Turkish land section is owned and operated by the Turkish energy company BOTAŞ. According to Gazprom, the Pipeline was built to diversify Russian gas delivery routes to Turkey and avoid third countries.

C- Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum Natural Gas Pipeline (BTE)

Also called The South Caucasus Pipeline, it is a natural gas pipeline from the Shah Deniz gas field in the Azerbaijan sector of the Caspian Sea to Turkey. It runs parallel to the Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan pipeline (oil). On 21 May 2006, the commissioning gas was pumped to the Pipeline from the Sangachal Terminal. First deliveries through the Pipeline commenced on 30 September 2006. Deliveries of gas from the Shah Deniz gas field started on 15 December 2006.

D- Türkiye-Greece Natural Gas Interconnector (ITG)

The Turkey -Greece gas pipeline, a vital component of the Southern Gas Corridor, is an almost 300 km long transportation project. It was proposed that natural gas from Azerbaijan's Shah Deniz gas field, Phase II, be transported to European markets via Greece and Italy. The Pipeline was completed in 2007, but Greece–Italy pipeline was not built due to the competing Trans Adriatic Pipeline. The Turkey–Greece pipeline is a 296-kilometer (184 mi) natural gas pipeline connecting Turkish and Greek gas grids. The Pipeline begins in Karacabey in Turkey and runs to Komotini in Greece.



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Turkish gas company BOTAŞ and Greek gas company DEPA signed the agreement on 28 March 2002. The intergovernmental agreement to build a natural gas pipeline between the two countries was signed on 23 December 2003 in Ankara. The foundation of the Pipeline was laid on 3 July 2005 by Prime Ministers Kostas Karamanlis and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. It was completed in September 2007. The Pipeline was officially inaugurated on 18 November 2007.

E- Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline Project (TANAP)

The Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline (TANAP) is a natural gas pipeline in Turkey. It is the central part of the Southern Gas Corridor, which connects the giant Shah Deniz gas field in Azerbaijan to Europe through the South Caucasus Pipeline and the Trans Adriatic Pipeline. The Pipeline is strategic for both Azerbaijan and Turkey. It allows the first Azerbaijani gas exports to Europe beyond Turkey. It also strengthens Turkey's role as a regional energy hub. The construction of the 1,841-kilometre (1,144 mi)--long Pipeline started in March 2015, and it was inaugurated in June 2018

F- TurkStream Natural Gas Pipeline

The TurkStream pipeline is a 930km offshore natural gas pipeline that runs across the Black Sea to connect Russian gas reserves to Turkey and southeast Europe. The Pipeline starts near the Russian coastal town of Anapa and makes landfall in the Thrace region in Turkey.

G- The Balkan Stream

The **Balkan Stream is the** European section of the TurkStream gas pipeline, an extension running through Bulgaria that transports Russian gas to Greece, Serbia, and Hungary. From the beginning of 2025, it will remain the only Pipeline carrying Russian gas to the E.U., reducing Russia's dependence on Ukraine.

H- Trans-Balkan pipeline

The **Trans-Balkan pipeline** is a natural gas pipeline between Turkey and Ukraine with branches to Greece and North Macedonia. Gazprom used it for



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gas deliveries through Balkan countries to Turkey. Before, the Blue Stream pipeline was the only international natural gas pipeline that supplied Turkey.

Eastern Mediterranean (EastMed) gas Corridor

Geopolitics and natural gas-related commercialization efforts have become top agenda items after the recent discoveries of natural gas resources in the Eastern Mediterranean (Levant) basin. However, technical, economic, and political facts illustrate that without regional stability, cooperation, and the contributions of global and regional actors, the application of future pipelines will require more.

Therefore, one can see many regional cooperation efforts between Israel, Cyprus, Egypt, Turkey, and Greece, which could help realize the first phase of exporting EastMed gas into world markets. Ankara aims to become a robust gas transit center and key gas trade hub. However, Turkey has political conflicts with Greece, Israel, and the Greek Cyprus Administration (GCA) that hinder its ability to be the most feasible pipeline export route.

Nevertheless, EastMed's gigantic reserves would require a pipeline system to commercialize and export the gas, and pipeline options without Turkey are considered politically possible but economically unfeasible. Once the political issues are resolved, Turkey shall be the primary market for integrated gas resources for the new EastMed Gas Corridor. The EastMed Turkey European Gas Project thus may represent the sole win-win for regional resources and an instrument of solution for EastMed's regional conflicts.

Since the beginning of the year, the Eastern Mediterranean has undergone two critical developments that will have significant geostrategic and energy-market implications—the discovery of the third-largest natural gas resources off the south coast of Cyprus by **ExxonMobil**, and the creation of a regional energy forum in Cairo. These developments confirm that energy issues will play a more prominent role in the new regional dynamics and that several protagonists will compete to exploit these newly discovered resources. Competition over their exploitation may create new conflicts in the region



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rather than facilitate the resolution of existing ones or cause more cooperation and prosperity.

For geopolitical reasons, Turkey is in a solid strategic position vis-à-vis energy markets and suppliers. In light of its location, Turkey has the potential and ambition to secure its energy demand and position itself as an energy hub for European markets.

However, significant obstacles are standing in the way for Turkey to accomplish this desirable position. First, it is an importer of gas, and, as is the case with most of Europe, it is dependent on Russian imports. Moreover, energy demand is expected to increase in the long run. While TurkStream meets its gas demand for now, like many European countries, Turkey is looking for ways to diversify its imports to reduce its dependency on Russia. Therefore, if the government wishes Turkey to become the region's central energy hub, it must first secure reliable and diverse energy sources.

Taking these circumstances into account, the discovery of significant gas resources in the Eastern Mediterranean and the fact that pipelines via Turkey would be the most efficient path to Europe should form a welcome opportunity for Turkey, Europe, and Eastern Mediterranean countries looking for gas markets alike. However, the unresolved Cyprus conflict and contentious relationships with countries in the region are essential obstacles.

The Prime Minister of Greece's Visited to Türkiye

Greek Prime Minister Mitsotakis visited Türkiye at President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's invitation to discuss the "current regional and global issues" and the signing of agreements aimed at "bolstering the foundational basis of relations. Eastern governments, especially Washington and Berlin, have been instrumental in promoting this meeting. Türkiye and Greece have recently achieved a "climate of reconciliation in the aftermath of "The Athens Declaration." The goals of the "positive agenda" and "confidence-building measures" aim to create a political climate conducive to negotiating deep-rooted differences, particularly regarding the delimitation of maritime zones in



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the Aegean and the Eastern Mediterranean and to focus on the joint action plan to develop bilateral relations in the fields of trade, economy, transportation, education, technology, environment, health, and social relations, within the so-called "positive agenda." Moreover, both parties agreed to allow Turkish citizens to enter 10 Greek islands this summer using immediate entry visas after agreeing to remove the complex procedures necessary to enter Europe's common "Schengen" area.

Roamers reported that both parties discussed the **Turkey -Greece gas pipeline** project and the Greece–Italy pipeline portion to connect it with the future **Eastern Mediterranean (EastMed) pipeline**.

The Cyprus Conflict as a Spoiler

The Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus and Turkey on one side and the internationally recognized E.U. member state Republic of Cyprus on the other side make competing claims over the extent of respective exclusive economic zones (EEZ) and thus the areas to exploit for natural resources. Initially, some expressed hope that the prospect of several hundred billion dollars in revenue from gas exploitation would cause both sides to seek a resolution to their long-running conflict. Such a resolution could enable Turkey and the E.U. to tackle many other issues in their relationship, such as updating the Customs Union.

The Republic of Cyprus is cooperating with Israel, Egypt, and Italy's Eni to exploit the newly discovered resources, leaving Turkey potentially marginalized. The stances of countries involved have hardened to the point where plans to bypass Turkey via a pipeline crossing southern Europe via Crete or transporting Cypriot gas to Egypt before exporting LNG to European markets are emerging, despite the former being a much more expensive and time-consuming endeavor.

Given its location, Turkey is the most cost-efficient export route for an offshore pipeline that can carry these resources from the region to Europe. Gas from the offshore fields could be transported via the Turkish city of Ceyhan to the



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TANAP pipeline, whose infrastructure for further transport through Turkey and to the E.U. is already in place. Nevertheless, Turkey's current conflictual relations with the countries concerned about resources—such as the Republic of Cyprus, Greece, and Israel—appear likely to prevent it from playing this role and becoming the region's leading energy hub.

Russia's role in these matters should also not be overlooked. Energy revenues are one of the few strengths of its economy and are critical to its public finances; therefore, they are highly concern for Moscow. Limiting competition among gas suppliers and keeping prices high is generally in Russia's interest. As mentioned, it is the dominant source of oil and gas for Turkey and most of Europe, a position it can use to its advantage and will try hard to protect.

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Turkish Local Elections: Stunning Results and Lessons to Learn

Perspectives Papers / By Dr. Bekir Atacan and Dr. Frank Musmar

Turkey held nationwide elections in March 2024 for city mayors, district mayors, and other local officials who will serve for the next five years. The election came a year after President Erdogan was re-elected in a knife-edge May 2023 election, defeating opposition leader Mr. Kemal Kilicdaroglu in a close runoff vote. After his presidential victory, Mr. Erdogan focused on reclaiming cities lost to the opposition in 2019. This was President Erdoğan's eleventh election victory in a row, returning to his election as Mayor of Istanbul in 1994. His victory was a continuation of his nearly three-decade dominance over Turkish politics. However, The Justice and Development Party (AK party) depended primarily on the charismatic character of President Erdoğan, who announced that this would be his final election, sending his voters to vote for the AK party nominees in the Mayor's election race. Nevertheless, the support of Mr. Erdoğan to the nominees was purely not enough.

Between both elections, a significant change happened to the Republican People's Party (CHP party). The party voted for fresh leadership in November 2023, five months after a devastating election defeat to President Erdoğan. Mr. Ozgur Ozel replaced Kemal Kilicdaroglu as the CHP's 8th leader. Mr. Özel directly starts with changes proposing to sway conservative voters with leftist policies that "object to poverty, inequality, and unemployment." He has also unequivocally condemned the oppression of the Kurds. Özel has chosen to be transparent about the CHP's relationship with the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Equality and Democracy Party (DEM Parti). The new leadership of CHP received stunning good news and extraordinary results in the latest election.



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The opposition CHP managed in the election for city and district mayors to retain all but one of its metropolitan mayoralities while winning three more. In particular, the party's candidates in Turkey's largest city, İstanbul and capital, Ankara, Mr. Ekrem İmamoğlu and Mr. Mansur Yavaş, were re-elected by a landslide 51% and 60%, respectively. Both mayors won majorities in their respective metropolitan councils, giving them significantly more powers than their previous terms.

The CHP Party also won many unexpected victories in areas that had been under AK party control for the previous two decades, such as Bursa, Balıkesir, Manisa, Kütahya, Adıyaman, Amasya, Kırıkkale, Kilis, and Denizli. Overall, the CHP party won 35 of Turkey's 81 provincial capitals, with the People's Alliance winning 24.

The number of votes that the Republican People's Party (CHP) obtained in this election was 13,983,000, while in the previous elections, it obtained 12,868,000 votes, meaning the progress is very small, and there is almost no significant difference. The CHP Party did not advance; the Justice and Development Party (AK) lagged, and its voters boycotted it (the AK party got 12,502,000 votes, while in the previous election, it got 20,580,000 votes). According to the results of the local elections held in Turkey on March 31, the opposition CHP Party obtained a percentage of 37.47, for the first time in 47 years, while the AK Party obtained a percentage of 35.49, for the first time since its founding in 2002 until now. Female candidates for mayors of 5 cities won the local elections in Urban, 6 provinces, and 64 regions.

One of the exciting results came from Ankara, the capital of Turkey, where the picture was terrific, and no one expected the difference to be this large. The candidate of the opposition CHP Party for the Greater Ankara Municipality, Mr. Mansur Yavaş, obtained 60.44 percent of the votes. In return, the



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candidate of the ruling Public Alliance in Ankara, Mr. Turgut Altinok, received 30.68 votes, meaning a significant difference of 30 percent.

Mr. Mansur Yavaş originally belonged to the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP). However, he ran for the Mayor's office in the city of Ankara on behalf of the opposition CHP Party, and at the same time, was a candidate for Vice President of the Republic, Mr. Kemal Kilicdaroglu, against the current President of the Republic, Mr. Erdogan, in the presidential elections ten months before the year 2023.

In this election, the number of votes obtained by the candidate of the CHP Party, Mr. Ekrem İmamoğlu, was 13,983,000, while he obtained 12,868,000 in the previous elections in 2019. This means the progress is minimal, and there is almost no significant difference. CHP Party did not advance; it was the AK Party that lagged. Its voters boycotted it and punished it because the ruling party did not achieve any progress from the economic perspective, any change for the better since President Erdogan succeeded in the presidential elections, held ten months ago, and until now, there has been no progress for the better. Instead, the opposite happened, with inflation rising and unemployment constantly rising, yet (he got 12,502,000 this election, and in the previous elections, got 20,580,000)

The results of this election witnessed the emergence of 3 strong CHP men who will compete internally for the influence and representation of CHP and, most notably, for the next presidential election. Before this election, Mr. Ekrem İmamoğlu was the only rising star; however, the results indicated otherwise. Mr. Ozgur Ozel proved successful in the first election under his leadership, and Mr. Mansur Yavaş landslide stunning winning in Ankara poisoned him as the true rising star of the party.

The public opinion poll results conducted just two weeks before the last local elections indicated that economy, inflation, and high prices were the most



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determinant factors, with 66.5 %; second came the subject of unemployment with 6.9 %, then the refugees with 3.2 %, then the earthquake with 2.2 %, then Terrorism with 2.0 %, the Kurdish issue with 1.1 %, and finally, the democracy with 1.4 % of people's interests. The Turkish economy is fragile, inflation is very high, and prices are currently very high compared to other countries; according to the public opinion poll just two weeks before the elections, the current government has not succeeded in changing and finding possible solutions. Accordingly, Turkish people voted for Mr. Erdoğan personally as a presidential candidate but were not encouraged enough to vote for his party because of its poor economic operation in the last few years.

The analysis of the vote percentages indicated many factors that led to the AK party's loss in the election. By looking at the variation between the presidential election votes and the last election votes, we can summarize it as follows:

Another surprising rising star in the election was the New Welfare Party (YENİDEN REFAH), ranked third, which changed the balance of the elections, as the party was on the side of Mr. Erdogan in the presidential elections ten months ago. However, in the local elections that were held in March just days ago, the party unintentionally helped the opposition, meaning the extra percentage of votes obtained by the CHP party in the top ten major cities, as well as in the other cities, represent a minimal increase in the percentages compared to the last presidential percentage.

Moreover, The Kurdish Equality and Democracy Party (DEM PARTY), which was and still is alongside the opposition CHP Party and one of Mr. Ekrem Imamoglu's most important supporters, won a small fraction of extra votes in the top ten major cities as well as in other small cities, in comparison to the number of votes obtained in the presidential election.



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The Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), the right hand of President Erdogan, which is a primary partner of the ruling Justice and Development Party, obtained fewer percentage of votes in the top ten major cities and also in other small cities, in comparison to the number of votes obtained in the presidential election. The Good Party (İYİ PARTİ) supports the opposition CHP Party, even if they have weakened recently, but still won a small percentage of votes in the top ten major cities and the other small cities. Looking at other factors, we see a decrease in voter percentage between the last two elections, as the percentage was 87.15 in the presidential election but dropped to 77.88 in the last election. The total registered electoral votes throughout Turkey were 61,430,934. Votes. In other words, the percentage of voters who did not vote was 14 million. Those who went to vote in the local elections in March were 48,15788.

This means that the percentage of voters who did not go to the poll mainly was those who voted for Mr. Erdogan in the presidential elections held only ten months ago. The reason behind not voting for Mr. Erdogan again was the drop in the government approval rate and the lack of success of the AK party in achieving positive results for the benefit of the voters on the subjects of unemployment, high prices, and inflation.

Turkey needs to change and modernize the political parties, party heads, and leaders who will be more powerful and influential in managing the next phase of the Turkish Republic with a new beginning according to a new world order, and according to the official data and surveys we conducted, the desire of Turkish society is the beginning of a new phase of political change in Turkey, where we are witnessing political developments. There is a great deal of change and renewal in the next few years with new faces of political leaders and new political parties and the end of the stage of political leaders and political parties who now control the political, economic, and social scene in Türkiye.



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US State Department Approves the Sale of F-16 Fighters to Türkiye

Perspectives Papers / By Dr. Bekir Atacan

The Pentagon announced that the US State Department has approved the sale of F-16 fighter jets and related equipment to Turkey for \$23 billion. The Pentagon said, "The State Department has decided to approve a foreign military deal."

On the other hand, the Pentagon announced that the US State Department had approved the possible sale of F-35 aircraft to Greece for about \$8.6 billion. On Saturday, Chairman of the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Ben Cardin, announced the approval of the sale of F-16 fighter jets from the United States to Türkiye after Ankara approved Sweden's membership in NATO. Cardin said, "I pay tribute to the Turkish Parliament for



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its important vote in favor of approving Sweden's NATO accession protocol and to Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan for signing. He added, "My approval of Turkey's request to purchase F-16 aircraft was conditional on Türkiye's approval of Sweden's membership in NATO. But "This was not a decision I took lightly," he said, noting that he looked forward to the beginning of a "new chapter" in the relationship between the United States and Türkiye and the expansion of NATO. Last Thursday, the White House sent a letter to members of the US Congress urging them to approve the sale of the F-16 Type aircraft deal" And modernization equipment for Türkiye worth \$20 billion.

It is noteworthy that the majority of members of the Turkish Parliament approved, yesterday, Tuesday, a draft law approving the protocol for Sweden's accession to NATO. Sweden, as a member of the European Union, agreed during negotiations with the Turkish President, In exchange for ratifying its application to join NATO, it will assist in Türkiye's accession process to the European Union. At the same time, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg had stated that the issues of Sweden's accession to NATO and Türkiye's accession to the European Union "are not related to each other."

In May 2022, Finland and Sweden applied for membership in NATO. While the two countries believe that what prompted them to abandon their neutrality and move towards joining the alliance was the special Russian military operation in Ukraine, and Finland became the 31st member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), on April 4, 2023.

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Concessions and Gains behind Sweden's NATO Bid Approval

Perspectives Papers / By Dr. Bekir Atacan

On Jan 23, 2024, the Turkish Parliament approved Sweden's request to join NATO. The approval process took 20 months of diplomatic dialogue between Ankara and many NATO members, especially the United States, which resulted in some concessions and gains. Even though Sweden still needs Hungary's approval before it can join the military alliance, the step taken by the Turkish Parliament was historic. Finland and Sweden requested to join the military alliance. Turkiye approved Finland's request to join the alliance in April 2023 but demanded that Sweden take further steps to eliminate those it considers terrorists. Accordingly, what concessions Stockholm, Helsinki, Washington, and other NATO countries made to allay Ankara's fears and demands?

During an alliance meeting in Madrid in 2022, Turkey reached an agreement with Sweden and Finland under which the two countries agreed to lift the arms embargo on Ankara and take measures against members of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party and the so-called separatist Gulen movement, which Ankara accuses of being responsible for an attempted coup in 2016. Moreover, Ankara waited for the United States' approval to purchase \$20 billion worth of F-16 aircraft and 79 modernization kits for military aircraft within its air force.

In an extraordinary and questionable action, in 2022, Stockholm imposed a ban on exporting military equipment to Turkiye without revealing details of companies or products; however, according to Turkiye's demands, in June 2023, Sweden introduced a new draft anti-terrorism law that states that joining



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any terrorist organization is illegal, saying that by doing so it had fulfilled its part of the agreement. Later last year, a Swedish high court blocked the extradition of two Turks whom Ankara says are Gulen supporters. An appeals court also upheld the conviction of a man for attempting to finance the Kurdistan Workers' Party, which the European Union and the United States classify as a terrorist group. In response to criticism directed at Stockholm from Turkey and other Muslim-majority countries, Swedish officials said that they are considering the possibility of changing a law to prevent people from burning copies of the Qur'an in public places.

Finland, for its part, agreed in 2022 to consider granting permits for arms exports to Turkiye on a case-by-case basis. After waiting nearly a year, Ankara said it had decided to join the alliance. Accordingly, other NATO members, such as Canada, agreed to resume talks with Turkey regarding lifting restrictions on the export of drone parts, including optical equipment. The Netherlands also lifted restrictions on arms shipments to Türkiye. One issue that was Ankara's primary demand was Washington's approval of Ankara's request to purchase F-16 fighter jets and 79 modernization kits for its old aircraft. However, the deal was halted due to objections from the US Congress to Ankara's refusal to give the green light to expand NATO and to Ankara's record in the field of human rights and its policy towards Syria. No official public statements from the United States confirmed the link between the approval of Sweden's request and the "F-16" deal. However, President Joe Biden often hinted that there was a link between the agreement and Sweden's request. However, a day after President Erdogan gave Sweden the green light to join NATO last July, the White House said it would transfer F-16 jets to Turkiye in consultation with Congress. Ankara applied to purchase F-16 aircraft in 2021 but faced objections from the United States Congress due to its delay in expanding the military alliance and its human rights record. Since then, Ankara has floated the possibility of purchasing Eurofighter jets instead.



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Most likely, Ankara will delay the last step of the process until the F16 deal is finalized. According to the Turkish constitution, the President has to sign the Parliament's decision into law within 15 days, and it has to be published and published in the Official newspapers to become law. If the 15-day period expires before signing, the President will return the draft law to the Parliament to vote again, which constitutes a return to square one once the President signs the Parliament's decision into law. After that, Turkey will deliver the final document stating its ratification to Washington under NATO rules. Accordingly, Ankara might wait for the official notification of the F-16 aircraft deal to the US Congress by the US State Department, and after that, Ankara will deliver the final document stating its ratification to Washington under NATO rules.

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Why Secretary of State Antony Blinken Visited Türkiye First

Perspectives Papers / By Dr. Bekir Atacan

US Secretary of State Mr. Antony Blinken is the first Secretary of State to visit the region and Türkiye five times in three months. However, this time, Mr. Blinken's fifth visit to the area started with Türkiye. The visit that occurred on January 6, 2024, concentrated on issues related to bilateral relations, Sweden's membership in NATO, the ceasefire between Hamas-Palestine and Israel, and the start of dialogue and negotiations between the two sides regarding the peace process and Türkiye's role, Türkiye's role in fighting terrorism, led by the Kurdistan Workers' Party and other parties in northern Syria and Iraq, the ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine and the role Türkiye plays in NATO.

However, before the assassination of Mr. Al-Arouri, which Israel carried out, there was initially a planned visit by Mr. Blinken to Israel first and then a visit to the countries of the region afterward. Moreover, after the assassination of Mr. Al-Arouri, it was announced that Mr. Blinken's visit to Israel would be postponed, and it was announced that Mr. Blinken would visit Türkiye...? What does Mr. Blinken seek from his visit to Türkiye? There are two reasons for that move: First, Israel attacked Lebanon, and secondly, the statements of the Israeli Minister of Finance and the Minister of National Security; however, this does not mean that Mr. Blinken will not visit Israel.

After visiting Türkiye, Mr. Blinken visited Greece; why Türkiye and Greece...? The answer is in the United States' bargaining strategy with Türkiye over the Sweden issue. One of the reasons for offering a visit to Türkiye is the issue of Sweden joining NATO and the issue of selling F-16 fighters (the American policy and the way it evades).



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After removing Türkiye from the F35 program, Türkiye paid approximately \$2 billion to buy F-35 fighters; afterward, Türkiye decided not to buy the F-35 due to its many defects and the high cost of flights and maintenance in addition to Türkiye's stealth fighter program that will begin production in 2030.

The Turkish Air Force is in dire need of purchasing fighters in the next six years, and it also needs to modernize its existing fighters. The United States removed Türkiye from the F-35 program under the pretext that the S400 Türkiye would reveal the fighter's secrets to the Russians. Accordingly, Türkiye asked to use the program money that had already been paid to buy 40 F-16 fighters and modernize 80 of the existing fighters. The United States' response was evasive, without confirming or denying the Turkish demands, and Türkiye responded by denying Sweden's application to Join NATO; then the United States linked the sale of F-16 fighters to Türkiye on the condition of approving Sweden's request to join NATO.

Accordingly, Türkiye submitted a request to purchase Euro Typhoon fighters from Britain in a message to the United States that it had abandoned purchasing the F-16 fighter and hinted that if the Euro Typhoon deal were not honored, Türkiye would turn to Russia and China to secure the purchase of the fighters.

Across the western borders, Greece has a strong lobby in the United States Congress, and the Greek lobby in the Congress stipulated that for them to agree to sell the fighters to Türkiye, they must pledge not to use them over the Aegean Sea. Türkiye, in turn, rejected any conditional sale. Accordingly, the Greek lobby increased its pressure and stipulated Türkiye's withdrawal from Cyprus, and at the same time, Greece submitted an order to purchase 24 F-35 fighters. The United States realized that selling the fighters to Greece on account of Türkiye would change the balance of the air force in favor of Greece over Türkiye, and Türkiye would then secure the purchase of equal



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stealth fighters from other countries. Accordingly, the United States evaded Greece's request as well.

Sweden made some concessions to Türkiye regarding the conditions that Türkiye placed on Sweden, and Türkiye took some measures as proof of good faith to ratify Sweden's request. President Erdogan approved Sweden's pledge, and the Parliament's external committee approved the decision, waiting for the final parliament voting to approve it. Accordingly, Türkiye responded to the United States that it was working on the process and that it would not ratify Sweden's accession to NATO until the sale of the fighters was approved.

Mr. Blinken, in turn, is coming to Türkiye to play the politics of Sweden's approval for F-16, or the United States may be forced to sell F-35 fighters to Greece. This is one of the reasons for Mr. Blinken's visit to Türkiye and then going directly to Greece.

What about Gaza?

Mr. Blinken visited the countries of the region to mention that the United States has put pressure on Israel to preserve the lives of civilians in Gaza and the West Bank, saying that Israel's upcoming operations in the third phase will only target Hamas fighters, negotiating the release the prisoners, and increasing the humanitarian aid in Gaza.

The United States wants to work with the countries of the region to reduce tension and ensure that a regional war does not erupt, especially after Israel bombs Beirut and after the tension in the Red Sea. Mr. Blinken is visiting the region's countries to pledge to adhere to the American peace plan presented to the region's countries under the title (Establishing a semi-independent Palestinian state, similar to the state of Kosovo and the Turkish Republic of Cyprus). Since the beginning of the war, the United States has been repeating that a Palestinian state must be established, and this project was presented to



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the state of the region.

From the United point of view, the project to establish a Palestinian state will contribute to increasing normalization with Israel among the countries of the region; it will contribute to establishing peace in the Middle East and to eliminating resistance movements because the Palestinians will have a state, and this state will become cooperative with Israel, and the security of Israel's borders will be guaranteed. At the same time, with this solution, Gaza will be reconstructed by regional countries.

Accordingly, the United States wants Turkiye on board with its efforts, to contribute to future reconstruction efforts in Gaza, to work its diplomacy to contain the spread of the Gaza conflict, and to participate in any multi-national force established and deployed in the region to keep any subsequent peace.

What's more?

Turkiye, on several occasions, criticized the US for its support of YPG and the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), which Turkiye considers terror organizations. Moreover, a Turkish unmanned aircraft was shot down by the US after it got too close to US forces during a Turkish military operation in northeastern Syria against YPG. The US considers YPG and SDF as local partners in the war against Daesh. This disagreement will continue to create a feeling of distrust between the two NATO allies. Mr. Blinken discussed the war in Ukraine, the Black Sea Grain Initiative, and peace initiatives between Azerbaijan and Armenia

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