

EUROPEAN UNION AND GAS FACTOR IN THE CYPRUS ISSUE

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ABSTRACT

The Cyprus issue is not only the ethnic conflict between the Greek and Turkish communities of the island, but also a complex, multifaceted phenomenon in the international relations. Recently, one of its aspects has become the "raw material" factor. It adds to the regional geopolitical disposition greater complexity and unpredictability. The international players involved in the new context, which is associated with the gas field discovered in the inshore waters of the Republic of Cyprus, include the European Union. The article research subject is a comprehensive analysis of EU policy within the new factor. Using the methods for synthesis and analysis, comparative comparison of data from multiple sources, the specific character of positions of the key regional and international players was consistently defined. The EU policy characteristics were systematized in the light of the additional element in the Cyprus issue. The conclusion was made that there was no EU strategy in the energy policy for the Eastern Mediterranean.

Keywords: *Cyprus problem, European Union, Aphrodite gas field, Exclusive Economic Zone, Cyprus settlement*

1. INTRODUCTION

This article is aimed at a comprehensive analysis of one of the faces of the multicomponent phenomenon related to the international political aspects of the Cyprus issue. The authors of the work focus on the "raw material" geopolitical factor included in the agenda of international relations in the Eastern Mediterranean relatively recently, since 2011; it is associated with the discovery of natural gas fields in the inshore waters of the Republic of Cyprus (RC). Discovery of gas reserves brought to this region not only great opportunities and prospects, but it also became a "trigger" to increased tension in international relations.

One of the "tension points" is a dispute between the Republic of Cyprus and Turkey concerning delimitation of the boundaries of the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) in each country. Moreover, the confrontation between Nicosia and Ankara on the gas issue is directly projected onto the plane of the Cyprus issue; there is another layer of the Cyprus issue's "pie". Among the players participating in the regional "raw material" field of the Cyprus issue, the European Union (EU) should be highlighted. The subject of this article incorporates analyzing the factor of the gas field in the waters of the Republic of Cyprus as one of the elements of the Cyprus issue and Cyprus policy of the EU after 2011 in the context of the "gas dispute" in the Eastern Mediterranean as a new element of the Cyprus issue.

Until now there has been no place for a critical and coherent analysis of the Cyprus issue in the context of the above realities in the large array of scientific literature on the Cyprus issue and EU policy in its settlement [1]. On the following pages, the authors try to fill this gap, what adds a scientific novelty to this work.

As regards the methodology, the general scientific methods for synthesis and analysis were used in the study. At the level of the common logical scientific research methods, the great practical importance was

given to generalization methods for formal logic - deduction and induction. When working with sources, the comparative method was actively involved.

Application of the above methods resulted in clear performance of the set tasks: position of the international players - the European Union, Republic of Cyprus and Turkey - on the "raw material" factor was clarified and analyzed, intercommunal negotiations in Cyprus were scrutinized, and finally concrete actions of the parties were examined within the study subject.

The Cyprus issue is a very complex and complicated phenomenon. Before setting out to explore one of its faces, let us turn to the structure of the Cyprus issue as a subsystem of international relations. Three structural layers can be identified here:

- local in the form of intercommunal contradictions, its participants are the Greek and Turkish communities of Cyprus;
- regional as reflection of the Turkish-Greek confrontation, interstate relations between Turkey and the Republic of Cyprus, which are superimposed on the Cyprus issue;
- external (international) as representation of influence on the intra-Cypriot situation and Turkish-Greek relations of extraregional forces engulfed to any extent into the Cyprus conflict [2].

2.POSITION OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

The "United Europe" can be a beneficiary of the recent natural gas discovery off the coast of the Republic of Cyprus from several points of view. Firstly, the Greek Cypriots, residents of the Republic of Cyprus - EU Member State, it seems in this case they will be able to effectively deal with the financial crisis and will benefit from the "blue fuel" production and sale. It should be recalled here that in 2012 - 2013 the RC faced the banking system collapse, which consequences have not been overcome till now. Continuing the economic topic, we note that a positive impulse from the "raw material factor" could spread to such countries of the Middle Eastern region as Israel and Lebanon. Thereby, the regional instability potential will be significantly reduced.

Back in November 2012, the European Parliament's Committee on Foreign Affairs confirmed the strategic importance of exploration of oil and gas fields in the Mediterranean Sea and called for elaboration of European policy in the field of oil and gas production [3]. Within its framework, the mechanism for the delimitation of the EEZ should be developed in accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea in order to avoid any contradictions with third parties.

As known, since May 1, 2014 the Republic of Cyprus is a full-fledged member state of the European Union. The EU supports the right of one of its members to enter into contracts for the gas field exploitation in its territorial waters with third countries. The Members of the European Parliament periodically make statements about the imperativeness of having respect to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the RC. They urge Ankara to stop the pressure on the Republic of Cyprus concerning the latest development of hydrocarbon reserves on its territory. Štefan Füle, EU Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy, commented on the subject of growing tension as part of a regional level of the Cyprus issue - "gas" issue relations between Ankara and Nicosia. He called the antagonists on normalization of their relations and need to exercise restraint [4].

3. .HISTORY OF THE GAS FIELD DISCOVERY. POSITION OF THE REPUBLIC OF CYPRUS

The exploration works in the territorial waters of the Republic of Cyprus started in 2007 [5]. US-based Noble Energy conducted them. Its activity resulted in the Aphrodite gas field discovery in December 2011; the potential gas field reserves are estimated at 1 to 3 billion cubic meters [5]. This volume is sufficient to meet the raw material needs of Cypriots for several decades. At present, the issue of construction of liquefied natural gas plant is discussed in the RC. At the same time, possible construction of a gas pipeline is considered.

However, apologists of the gas pipeline transport are facing objective circumstances, which hinder the implementation of their idea. First, realization of the idea to construct a "pipe" to Israel is problematic and risky in view of the unstable situation in the Palestinian conflict [5]. Secondly, the proposal of laying a gas pipeline in the other direction, from the Republic of Cyprus to Greece, is beyond common sense: distance of eight hundred kilometres between these countries rejects this option as an expensive and unprofitable [5]. Finally, connecting the RC and Turkey with a pipeline would be the most profitable and rational option. As far as is known, tense political relations between Nicosia and Ankara "on the ground" of the Cyprus issue prevent implementation of this plan.

Government of the RC actually clearly defined its Exclusive Economic Zone by securing its borders in accordance with the international maritime law. The Republic of Cyprus signed the Agreements Concerning the Delimitation of the Exclusive Economic Zone along the Median Line [5] with Egypt (2003), Israel (2007) and Lebanon (2010). Once again, the issue with Turkey remains open.

Regional contradictions between the Republic of Cyprus and Turkey are reflected in the Cyprus issue as in a water drop. No doubt, the discovery of natural gas reserves may give a chance to a positive impulse for the Cyprus settlement. It should be noted that initially the government of the RC expressed its willingness to share, in the future, the "blue fuel" export profit with the Turkish Cypriots. Subsequently, the Greek Cypriot establishment renounced such a generous statement; condition of equal access to the proceeds was linked to the Cyprus settlement, what "complicated" its agenda and led to stagnation of the process.

4. TURKEY'S POSITION

Turkey does not recognize Cyprus as a state, therefore, it casts doubt on the legitimacy of the latter to conduct drilling at the Aphrodite field and derive economic benefit from natural resources. Ankara believes that the government of the Republic of Cyprus has no authorities to represent the interests of Turkish Cypriots and the whole island with them.

Field development has always been a source of tension in relations between Turkey and RC. In some cases, Ankara signalled its readiness to "take all necessary measures" so that to stop the process. One of the Turkey's steps, as mentioned above, was sending ships to the waters located in the immediate vicinity of the platforms of the oil production company Noble. The Government of Cyprus regarded such facts as "military provocation."

Given the Cyprus issue, the Turkish Cypriots "answered" to the Republic of Cyprus that they signed an agreement with a Turkish company. According to its conditions, the state oil company of Turkey was licensed to carry out geologic exploration in the territorial waters of the self-proclaimed TRNC [5]. In September 2011, a continental shelf delimitation agreement [5] was signed with Turkey, but not registered.

5. RAW MATERIAL" FACTOR IN THE CYPRUS SETTLEMENT

The key form of interaction between the local level players of the Cyprus issue is a meeting of community leaders and consultation with experts from both sides. Since February 2014, the sixth round of negotiations on the Cyprus settlement has been held under the UN auspices. In addition to the discussion subjects traditional to the Cypriot peacemaking - security, sovereignty, ownership - a "resource issue" shapes its agenda.

On September 21, 2014, after the next meeting of Mr. Nicos Anastasiades, President of the Republic of Cyprus, with the Turkish Cypriot community's leader D. Eroglu, the chief expert of the Turkish Cypriot negotiating team Kudret Ozersay stated: "Now the real negotiations will begin" [5]. Unfortunately, optimism of the Turkish Cypriots' representative Mr. Ozersay did not last long. At the end of September 2014, amid growing cooperation in the energy sphere between Cyprus, Greece, Israel and Egypt, Turkey dared to a controversial step perceived in these countries as a provocation. So, the geological survey vessel Barbaros entered under the flag of Turkey the Exclusive Economic Zone of the Republic of Cyprus [5]. Ankara denied any statements of violation of the maritime border of the RC [5]. Furthermore, the Turkish side committed blackmail, and the Cyprus issue became its subject. Turkey stated that the geological survey mission off the Cyprus coasts would continue until the end of April 2015, if the Turkish Cypriots Cypriot were not be guaranteed a high status in the negotiations on the Cyprus dispute, and in the discussion of issues related to the natural resources of Cyprus, including gas fields [5].

Turkey's statement of intention to "settle down" for a long time in the territorial waters of the RC caused a sharp negative reaction of its leadership. In October President N. Anastasiadis announced his withdrawal from the Cyprus settlement stressing that the first condition for its resumption is departure of the Turkish ship from the Cyprus EEZ and suspension of NAVTEX geological survey mission [5]. At the time of this writing, the first part of the imperative was executed - the vessel left the recognized Cyprus' EEZ and entered the port of Famagusta in the territory of the partially recognized Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) [5]. However, a year after the stated date the NAVTEX mission has not been yet finished [5], therefore, there remains an opportunity for further provocations and pressure on the RC by Turkey.

6 .LACK OF EU's POLITICAL STRATEGY IN THE "RAW MATERIAL" FACTOR OF THE CYPRUS ISSUE

The main source, which regulates the "rules of the game" for the now ongoing sixth round of the intercommunal negotiations in Cyprus, is the Joint Declaration agreed by leaders of the island nation communities on February 11, 2014. The above document, in our opinion, became the first significant achievement that took almost ten years after failure of the Annan Plan in the Cypriot issue. "Behind the scenes" of the diplomacy, by which results the Cypriot antagonists "agreed on the terms", what is stated openly, were the United States.

The sixth paragraph of the Joint Declaration limited de jure any opportunity for foreign players to be a mediator in the Cyprus issue: "Any type of arbitration is not permitted" [6]. On one hand, no doubt, interference in the internal affairs of a sovereign state is unacceptable, and it contradicts the international law. However, on the other hand, it should be understood that the brokerage capacity of such a large and influential player as the EU in terms of a potential gas field dispute resolution is high enough, therefore, it should not have been limited.

Thesis about absence of the EU's political strategy in the "raw material" factor is plausible. In its Cypriot policy, the European Union was dealing with everything but the named circumstance that is confirmed by the facts of the EU activities in relation to Cyprus in the first months after the Joint Declaration was signed. In his letter dated February 25, 2014 addressed to the European Parliament deputy from the Republic of Cyprus (RC) A. Papadopoulou, Ștefan Füle, EU Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy, supported the return of Varosha district under the jurisdiction of the RC

as one of the confidence-building measures [7]. The issue of Varosha was the leitmotif of the two-day working visit of Mr. Füle to the Republic of Cyprus (7 - 8 April 2014) [8,9,10,11].

7.RESULTS

The following results flow from the comprehensive study of the research subject. First of all, discovery of reserves in the Eastern Mediterranean, in the waters of the Republic of Cyprus, entered a new component in the Cyprus issue. Indeed, the "gas resources" are a key word combination that has become an integral part of diplomacy, first of all, at the local level of the Cyprus issue; it is a turning point, which will, in the not too distant future, bring a positive impulse in the Cyprus settlement, or doom its participants to maintain the status quo, to continue the "frozen" conflict.

Giving to the "gas" factor an impulse of a catalyst to accelerate the resolution of the Cyprus antagonism - execution of this task depends on the policy of the multilevel players in the Cyprus issue. Consecutive analysis conducted as to positions of the key players at the regional and international levels of the Cypriot situation in the context of the "raw material" factor revealed serious political differences between Turkey and the Republic of Cyprus.

The EU's regional energy policy appears to be able to serve as one of the ways to overcome the regional contradictions reflected on the Cyprus issue. Nevertheless, the European Union is not an influential player in this aspect. As stated on the previous pages, its policy is limited for the most part to statements and regulatory laws. Moreover, in our view, the European Union gained a role of "technical adviser", it is not a unified, indivisible and effective player in the Cypriot situation. The EU's position and tactics in the Cyprus issue eloquently confirm its failure within the context of the "raw material" factor to switch a new "variable" in the Cyprus "equation" onto a constructive track.

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