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Factors Affecting Turkish-Greek Geopolitical Competition in the Eastern Mediterranean

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Abstract: Eastern Mediterranean is a region around the Mediterranean Sea, located between the Middle East and the strategic straits of Turkey and the Suez Canal. It has been the focus of geopolitical competition between Turkey and Greece, especially in the early 19th century. The dispute between the Greeks and the Ottoman Caliphate over independence culminated in 1829 is persisting until now. Using data from the Internet and written sources, this descriptive-analytical study aims to identify the possible causes of the geopolitical rivalries between Turkey and Greece in the Eastern Mediterranean. First, we identified the sources and extracted the content, and finally processed data. The conflict between the two countries dates back to the Ottoman Caliphate. In 1821, the Greeks revolted against the Ottomans and became independent in 1829. The second confrontation between the two countries took place after the First World War and the occupation of Turkey by Greece. The Greeks sought to annex Western Anatolia to Greece because, according to the Treaty of Sèvres, in addition to Western Thrace, Greece gained Eastern Thrace, which is located about forty kilometers from Istanbul. After the signing of the Treaty of Lausanne and the departure of the Greeks, the Republic of Turkey declared independence in 1924. After the Second World War, the rivalry between the two countries entered a new phase. Competition over territorial sea boundaries, ownership over Cyprus and Kastelorizo islands, the exploitation of energy resources, the issue of Western Thrace, Greece's support for the Turkish opposition, the security of the official borders between the two countries, and the crossing of refugees are among these disputes. Thus, historical issues and competition over territorial, border, maritime, energy, and ethnic issues have caused a permanent conflict between the two countries. In recent years, despite the diplomatic activities between the two countries, most of the disputes have remained unresolved.

Keywords: Turkey, Greece, Mediterranean Sea, Eastern Mediterranean, Geopolitical Competitions

1. Introduction

Geostrategic domains are placed at the highest level of the "spatial hierarchy of the global structure". The most important distinguishing factor in a basin is the degree by which it has been formed with the "marine dimension" or "continental dimension". In the current world, three geostrategic basins have evolved: Terrestrial (Russia), marine (Atlantic and Pacific trade area), and terrestrial-marine basins (East Asia) [14]. Each of the three basins consists of different geopolitical regions and countries. The most important geostrategic basin in the world is the sea basin, which consists of five geopolitical regions and countries located on the edge of Eurasia [31]. One of these geographical areas that have been the center of global change in the years after World War II in the Eastern Mediterranean region. The region is a part of the Mediterranean Sea that is of great geopolitical importance. This basin is located on the one hand adjacent to the geopolitical region of Southwest Asia and, on the other hand, between the strategic straits of the Bosphorus and Dardanelles in the north, the Suez Canal in the south, and Gibraltar in the west. The basin is a corridor for the transfer of energy and goods from the Far East and the Strait of Malacca to the Aegean, Marmara Sea, Black Seas in the north, the Strait of Gibraltar, and the Atlantic Ocean in the west.

Various Asian, European, and African countries have geopolitical interests in this basin. However, the two major European countries in the Eastern Mediterranean that are facing geopolitical challenges and are in fierce geopolitical competition are Turkey and Greece. These two neighboring

countries with a long history of disputes. The history of the Athens-Ankara dispute dates back to the Ottoman Caliphate and the Turkish rule over Greece. From the past until now, the two countries have been facing geopolitical tensions. Thus, although both counties are members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), they have adopted an aggressive position and threatened each other with military intervention [12]. Relations between the two countries have become more challenging in recent years, despite intermittent diplomatic moves by the authorities to resolve tensions and develop bilateral relations. In general, these two countries have not had very friendly trade, tourism, or social relations with each other throughout history, even in times when there was no dispute between them. An issue of interest is to find possible causes of the geopolitical rivalries between Turkey and Greece in the eastern Mediterranean? Accordingly, it can be argued that these rivalries are the outcome of long-standing disputes between the two countries over land, border, and maritime issues. Tensions between Turkey and Greece over territorial waters, islands, the continental shelf, and other maritime rights, including energy resources, are escalating in the absence of diplomatic progress. As tensions between the two countries escalate, including tensions over gas exploration efforts in the eastern Mediterranean, conflicting views are rapidly changing into militarist orientations. Compared to previous studies, the most important contribution of this study is that it investigates security and political disputes between the two Eastern Mediterranean European countries from a geopolitical perspective.

2. Theoretical Framework

Geopolitics is the science of power relations: Accordingly, the relations of countries and governments in the international system are a function of the level and extent of their power in the world power structure. The relations of governments are of the type of domination, sub-domination, and interaction based on balance and mutual respect at regional, continental, and global levels, all reflecting the structure of power in the relations of states. In other words, geopolitics studies the power relations between states. Geopolitics also studies the rivalry between the components of the core of the world powers for dominance over nearby countries [37]. Geopolitics is a special method that discovers and analyzes critical phenomena and defines offensive or defensive strategies over a territorial area by focusing on human and natural geographical environments [15]. Geopolitics as the knowledge of gaining power: From this geopolitical point of view, it studies and proposes solutions that make it possible for governments and political institutions to acquire power on a national, transnational, and global scale [1].

Geopolitical relations are relations that are established between countries, governments, and political actors based on a combination of elements of politics, power, and geography. In the formation of any relationship between actors, the element of politics is reflected in the form of political actors, the element of power shapes the pattern and nature of the relationship and the attitude of actors towards each other, and the element of geography play a context-building role. The pattern of relations between political actors or, in other words, country nations is mainly competitive [6]. Countries seek geopolitical territory in geopolitical rivalries. The geopolitical territory is the geographical space and the people living in it are influenced by one or more political, cultural, economic, social, military, security variables, and other factors related to that country or a powerful actor that is interpreted as the core country. Peripheral countries that are under the influence of powerful countries are called “geopolitical realms”. In other words, geopolitical realms are cross-border territories. The political, economic, social, cultural, and values of countries outside the national borders spread in various ways, from formal to informal, in geographical regions and different countries of the world [6]. In the geopolitical competition, each country seeks to develop the geopolitical territory and increase its geopolitical boundaries resulting in the shrinkage of the geopolitical territory and the regression of the geopolitical boundaries of the other country [12]. At present, countries of the world pursue their economic, cultural, and political interests, Thus, each country has gone beyond its national borders by penetrating other regions and countries of the world, while expanding their sphere of influence and seeking geopolitical territory. This issue has led to a “geopolitical challenge” between different powers in the world's political geography due to conflicts of interest.

The main goal of any geopolitical challenge is to make the other party passive and change its behavior. A clear example of this is the use of ethnic-spatial groups against each other by India and Pakistan or Iran and Iraq [6]. Countries and governments use a variety of methods to strike at their rivals or limit their power of action. Geographical factors, both fixed and variable, have different types, the use of each of these factors against other countries can bring them to their knees and cause the actor to impose his will on the other side. The action of the Turkish government in blocking the waters of the Tigris and Euphrates to challenge the Iraqi and Syrian governments, Greece sheltering the fugitive members of the Turkish Kurdistan Workers' Party, and the claim of the Greek government on the islands in dispute with Turkey, etc. are examples of some actions to passivize the policies of rival states, which apply them whenever necessary to challenge a rival country. These actions have a huge geopolitical burden. Therefore, geographical factors, both fixed and variable, play a very influential role in geopolitical relations between countries.

3. Research Methodology

This descriptive-analytical study was conducted using the data collected through library and internet methods. The data were collected from books, documents, publications, articles, and Internet sites in three steps:

1. Identifying relevant sources
2. Extracting important content
3. Classifying and processing data.

4. Results

Turkey and Greece are two neighboring countries located in southeastern Europe, in the Balkans, and adjacent to the Mediterranean Sea. Turkey with an area of 785,347 square kilometers and a population of 84,225,000, is neighboring Iran, Nakhchivan, Armenia, and Georgia in the east, Iraq and Syria in the southeast, and Bulgaria and Greece in the northwest. In addition, Turkey has a marine border with the Black Sea from the north, the Marmara and the Aegean Seas in the west, and the Mediterranean Sea from the southwest [10]. Located in one of the most sensitive regions of the world, Turkey has a very strategic and important geographical location and is considered the crossroad between Northwest Asia and Europe. Many countries, including Iran and Iraq, use Turkish territory for the transit of goods and energy (Figure 1). In recent centuries, Turkey, known as the Ottoman Empire, has ruled large parts of the Middle East, North Africa, and Southeast Europe, including Greece. The political system of Turkey is a presidential republic with a single parliament.

Figure 1. *Turkey (Karimi, 2018: 100).*

Greece is another country in southeastern Europe and the Balkans. As a Eurasian country, Greece has an area of 131,990 square kilometers and a population of 10,816,286. Greece is bordered on the north by Albania, northern Macedonia, and Bulgaria, on the east by Turkey, on the south and east by the Mediterranean Sea, and on the west by the Greek Sea (Figure 2). Greece has about 6,000 islands, the largest of which is Crete, one of the five largest islands in the Mediterranean. Only 227 Greek are inhabited. Many Greek islands have been sold, and many of them are owned by the richest people in the world. Greece is the confluence of three continents of Asia, Europe, and Africa. It is the heir of ancient Greece, the Byzantine Empire, and nearly four centuries of Ottoman rule. Greece is currently a member of the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Greece's political system is a parliamentary republic and most of its citizens are Christians.

Figure 2. *Greece (Darbandi, 2013: 20).*

The Turkish-Greek conflict was rooted in the historical past and with current consequences consistent with real-world issues. Thus, this conflict needs to be addressed comprehensive analysis that is different from those used in the past. The disputes between the two countries, which are rooted in various factors such as independence and territorial, border, and maritime disagreements [39], need to be examined in a historical context with a geopolitical approach. The confrontation between Greece and Turkey, which is mainly geopolitical, has a long history and dates back to the years before the collapse of the Ottoman Empire because the Balkans, with Greece being also one of the countries in this region, was part of the Ottoman Empire during the years of Ottoman rule, and the Greek rulers were somehow appointed and approved by the Ottoman Caliph. The weakness of the Ottoman Caliphate due to the inefficiency of the caliphate over time, the weakness of the caliphs, internal competition for power, corruption, bribery, the weakness of the army, the dysfunctional economy, and most importantly the influence of global Freemasonry and Jewish Freemasonry at the heart of the caliphate, began in the late 17th century and peaked in the first half of the 19th century. This situation, which had spread like a pandemic to the political structure of the Ottoman Caliphate, created an opportunity for the enemies of the Caliphate, especially the non-Islamic world, to rise against the Caliphate and take the path of independence. One of the territories that refused to remain within the framework of the Ottoman Caliphate and took every opportunity to achieve independence was Greece, which not only considered itself the center of European culture and civilization but also did not have a good impression of the Islamic thought and Muslims. The following sections discuss the confrontation between the Ottoman Turks and the Greeks from the time of Greece's struggle for independence in 1821 up to the present:

4.1. The Geopolitical Confrontation of the Christian Greeks with the Ottoman Turks for Independence

From 1453 until 1821, Greece was part of the Ottoman Empire. The Greeks revolted against the Ottoman Empire, which had occupied the country for about 400 years, and they gained independence in 1829. Greek uprising culminated in March 1821. This war, which took place in the Balkans (Greece) and around the Aegean Sea, was not only a confrontation between the Ottoman Turks and the Greeks, but also a kind of confrontation between Islam and Christianity because the Greek revolutionaries were supported by European powers, and during the war, Europeans, including Britain, France, and Russia, supported the Greek separatists by sending money, weapons, and military advisers [18]. European powers, including Britain and France, supported any divergent action in Ottoman territory to challenge the Ottomans geopolitically and supported Greek independence groups as part of the process the Europeans carried out to overthrow the Ottoman Caliphate. One of the main actions of the Europeans to support Greek independence was the training of Greek independence-seeking forces. A clear example was Alexander Isilantis, the Greek military commander in the war of 1821. He lived in Tsarist Russia for fifteen years and fought in the Russian war against the Ottomans [2].

The Greek uprising for independence was accompanied by the support of European countries. The caliphate's mistreatment of people in some Christian areas, the vast Ottoman territory that blocked communication between Europe and the whole West to the East, and the Church and Christianity's strong dissatisfaction with the geopolitical influence of Islam and Muslims in Central Europe were important reasons for Europeans' support for the independence of Greece from the Ottoman Caliphate. In the face of European support for Greek independence, the Ottomans had no allies and relied solely on their military might. At this time, the power of the caliphate was very small and even the support of Egypt and Tunisia, which were part of the Ottoman colonies in Africa, could not cover this military weakness. Thus, the caliphate had to face a challenge from the Europeans, who had no purpose other than to bring the great Ottoman geopolitics to its knees and consequently failed to defend the western part of the caliphate. Accordingly, some military experts at the time saw the secession of Greece as a major blow to the great Ottoman geopolitics. The Europeans, who were very ideological and had no goal other than to drive the Ottomans out of continental Europe, could challenge the Ottomans geopolitically on their western borders after three centuries. After the independence of Greece, an ideological shift took place, ending the rule of an Islamic state and establishing a Christian state instead [25]. Greek independence was not only the resurrection of democracy for the Western world but also limited the Ottoman borders on the continent of Europe because the European powers created the imposed borders under the influence of European military superiority over the Ottomans over time, referred to the "Balkans" as the new borders of Europe. The Balkans were ruled by the Ottoman Empire from the 17th to the 19th century. However, at the end of the 19th century, the Ottomans lost control of most of the Balkan region, and many countries in the region became independent [4].

4.2. Turkey's Geopolitical Rivalry with Greece After the First World War

With the collapse of the Ottoman Empire at the end of World War I, fierce geopolitical rivalry broke out between Turkey as the successor to the caliphate and neighboring countries that were once part of the Ottoman caliphate over territorial issues that were a kind of geopolitical dispute and ethnic issues that were of geopolitical nature. The main conflict was between Turkey and Greece. At the end of World War I, Turkey and Greece clashed over the recapture of Turkish-occupied territories by Greece and the independence of Turkey as an independent state on the map of the world's political geography. Consequently, a war raged between the Turkish revolutionaries and the Greeks from 1919 to 1922. The Greek army landed in May 1919

with the support of the allies in Izmir, igniting the fighting spirit of the Turks. The invasion of the Greeks who were ruled by Turks in the past was unbearable for the Turks because the goal of the Greeks was to annex Western Anatolia to Greece [11]. In such circumstances, Mustafa Kemal was appointed by the Sultan as the General Inspectorate of Northern Anatolia to inspect the entire command centers of the Third Corps and oversee the disarmament of troops still resisting the allies. However, instead of following the caliph's orders, he established links between resistance and jihadist groups and also formed new groups to defend against the Greek invasion [50]. The arrival of Mustafa Kemal in Anatolia opened a new chapter in the contemporary history of Turkey and resulted in the separation of political power in Turkey. On one side, there was the Ottoman Caliph and his affiliated members who did not stop supporting the Allies. On the other side, there were Mustafa Kemal and his entourage, whose most important issue was to defend the country's territorial integrity and independence from foreigners, including the Greek invaders.

Under these circumstances, one of the main actions of Mustafa Kemal and other leaders of the Turkish nationalist movement was the signing of the "Amasya Protocol[1]". This protocol was signed in June 1919 as the first call of the "Turkish National Movement" against the foreign enemy. The protocol, while acknowledging the inability of the central government, called for the establishment of an independent committee to defend the country's independence. According to the Erzurum Congress (July 1919), in addition to the sovereignty of the nation, the national independence, and freedom of the Turkish territory, the authority and influence of the caliph had to be respected. The National Sivas Congress in September 1919 endorsed the Erzurum Resolution as a "national pact" and made it a national petition [52]. At that time, there was cooperation between Ataturk and the central government, and what prompted the caliph to send Mustafa Kemal to Anatolia was the caliph's trust in him in defense of national interests. However, the signing of the Treaty of Sèvres in 1920 caused a deep rift between the caliph and the nationalist Turks and led to severe protests against the Ottoman caliph [12].

The signing of the Treaty of Sèvres not only humiliated the Turks but also brought the country under attack by Greek invaders who did not have happy memories of the Turks during their rule over Greece. The Treaty of Sèvres reduced the geopolitical status of the Turks and instead increased the geopolitical weight of the Greeks because according to this treaty, which was signed in the French region of Sèvres, Greece gained access to western Turkey and eastern Thrace (up to 40 km from Istanbul). In addition, the city of Izmir and its suburbs would be placed under Greek rule for five years, after which it could join Greece if its people wished so. Thus, with the disintegration of the Arab world on the one hand and, most importantly, as a result of the Treaty of Sèvres, the territory of the Ottoman Empire was restricted to a part of northwestern Asia Minor. The National Assembly condemned the signing of the Treaty of Sèvres and considered its signatories traitors. Although the signing of this treaty caused public outrage, the Turkish War of Independence was mainly motivated by the invasion of the Greeks who were trying to capture Anatolia. However, the Turks won a decisive victory against the Greeks in a great battle under the command of General Mustafa Kemal along the Sakarya River. Because of this brilliant victory for the Turkish people, the Turkish National Assembly named General Mustafa Kemal the victor of the Holy War [27].

The last stage of the Turkish war with Greece occurred in August 1922. The Turkish army under the command of Mustafa Kemal launched a major attack. The Greeks demanded an end to the war. But Mustafa Kamal made progress despite their request. Turkish forces first entered Izmir. They then moved on to conquer the strategic Bosphorus and Dardanelles straits. The Allied forces in the Strait, mostly French, retreated, but the British did not stop resisting. Eventually, however, they surrendered, and a ceasefire agreement was signed in October 1922 in Moudania between the two sides, according to which Turkish rule in Istanbul, Boğazı, and eastern Turkey was agreed upon by the Allies, and the Greeks were forced to accept the terms of the ceasefire. The Mudanya ceasefire agreement was signed with the Ankara government, while a government was still in power in Istanbul, headed by the Ottoman Caliph and Tawfiq Pasha as its Prime Minister. This government had previously sentenced Mustafa Kemal and other Turkish nationalists to death [11]. One year after the signing of the Lausanne Treaty in 1923, the institution of the Caliphate was abolished and the Republic of Turkey declared independence in 1924 led by Mustafa Kamal. Although Turkey is located on the free seas, its borders are geographically delineated in a way that is not immune to geopolitical challenges. The country's major geopolitical challenges in the eastern Mediterranean since World War II are with Greece.

4.3. Turkey's Geopolitical Rivalry with Greece After World War II

After World War II, the rivalry between Turkey and Greece entered a new phase. The two neighboring countries that are located in the European part of Turkey in the Balkans are heavily involved in disputes over territorial waters, islands, energy resources, ethnic and religious minorities, border functions, illegal crossings of asylum seekers from Turkey to Greece, and other issues. These disputes have been so serious that they not only pushed the two countries to the brink of geopolitical confrontation, but have even prompted members of the European Union and, in some cases, NATO, to react against Turkey. From the 1970s onward, the main competition between the two countries is in the Mediterranean Sea, as will be discussed below.

4.3.1. Territorial Waters

The territorial sea or coastal sea is an area of the sea that is

1Amasya Görüşmeleri

attached to the territory of the coastal country. The baseline is used to determine the width of the territorial sea. According to the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, the territorial sea is 12 nautical miles per country. The specification of this maritime area was due to the threat that governments felt from the sea outside their borders [7]. Turkey's geographical position in the Mediterranean and its proximity to Greece is such that having a territorial sea has become a challenge for the country. The hypothetical midline between Greece and Turkey in the Aegean Sea and the Mediterranean is so close to the Turkish coast that it gives most of the ownership of the sea to the neighboring country. Greece in the Mediterranean Sea, under the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, grants its islands near the mainland of Turkey the right to a 12-mile territorial sea. A claim that deprives Turkey of its right to a territorial sea in its homeland and encloses it in the Gulf of Antalya. What has sounded the alarm for Ankara and caused concern is the Greek Parliament's efforts to expand its maritime borders in the Greek Sea. The Greek parliament intends to expand the country's territorial waters in the Greek Sea from six to twelve nautical miles. This move, which is in agreement with Albania, is considered a negative message for Turkey [21].

The main problem for Turkey is the territorial waters of the eastern Aegean Sea because the Greek government has threatened to expand its maritime borders in the Aegean Sea at the right time. Ankara claims the expansion of Greek naval territory in the Aegean, given the number of Greek islands in the sea, will effectively turn the Aegean into the Greek Sea. This plan seems unlikely to be implemented because disagreement in the Aegean Sea is an old geopolitical conflict between the Aegean neighboring countries and is not easily resolved. In addition, Ankara has not recognized or signed the UN Convention. Thus, it is not obliged to comply with the relevant regulations [12]. Another important issue regarding the size of the Turkish territorial sea is the “Seville Map” project in 2000 by Juan Luis Suarez de Vivero, a professor of human geography at the University of Seville (Figure 3). European countries also played a very active role in designing this plan and tried to challenge Turkey geopolitically. Therefore, after examining the geographical location of Turkey, they concluded that they could achieve their goal in the Eastern Mediterranean by designing a thoughtful map. In designing the map, they pursued three main goals: First, the Greek continental shelf starts from the small island of Kastellorizo, two kilometers off the coast of mainland Turkey, and continues to the middle of the eastern Mediterranean. Second, Turkey cannot access the eastern Mediterranean except through Antalya in the south. Third, under the plan, the Cyprus Exclusive Economic Zone was declared the official border of the European Union in 2004. A look at the above three goals shows that its output is nothing but the geopolitical isolation of Turkey. Therefore, given the danger that this plan posed to the national security and national interests of the Turks, they reacted quickly to it, and sometimes the ruling Turkish party (AK Party), especially Recep Tayyip Erdogan, threatened a military confrontation.

Figure 3. *Map of Seville.*

The reflection of the Seville map and Turkey's negative reaction to it led the European Union to see such a map as an individual idea, not a collective one. A member of the European Union stated that the Seville map had no political or legal value and the European Union also had no authority to decide on maritime borders because maritime borders should be handled under the supervision and decision of European countries. Even though this map was declared illegal, the Turks believe that this map shows the support of Europeans for Greece and was designed based on the will of Greece, in which a very limited share of the Mediterranean Sea is given to Turkey [33]. This plan aims to enclose Turkey within an area of 41,000 square kilometers. The Turkish government turned to Libya to challenge the founders of such a plan. Libya is a crisis-ridden country with a bankrupt government that became the center of a rivalry between regional and global powers after the Arab Spring. To revoke the Seville plan, the Turkish government signed a naval agreement with the Libyan National Accord government in 2019. Based on this agreement, the Turks drew up a map showing the boundaries of the two countries' exclusive economic zone and the continental shelf in the eastern Mediterranean (Figure 4). According to the map, the agreement signed between Turkey and Libya ignores the claims of a monopoly economic zone over the Greek islands, including the strategically important islands of Rhodes and Crete, located between Turkey and Libya. Undoubtedly, the agreement, which sought to challenge Greece and its European backers, shook the Eastern Mediterranean severely [34] and caused a great shock to Greece and European countries so as not to pursue the idea of designing and implementing such a plan and forced them to respect the national interests of Turkey. It should be noted that the attitude of Turkish politicians and statesmen is not the same as that of Greece and its European backers.

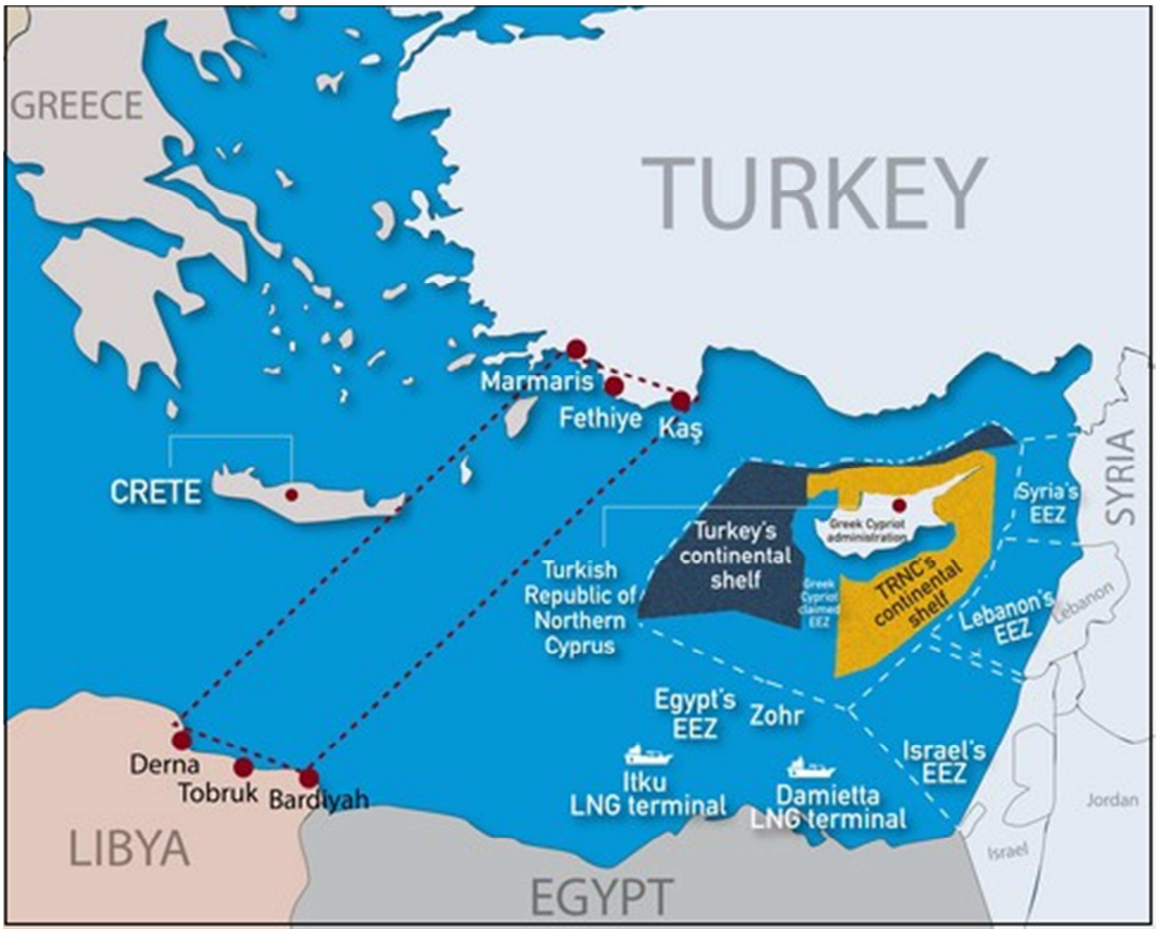

Figure 4. *The exclusive economic zone between Turkey and Libya.*

The Turkish officials do not have the same position in dealing with Greece and each thinks differently. In other words, they do not have the same strategy, and this is a special privilege for Greece. Unlike Erdogan and his party, who have repeatedly warned of war and threatened the Greek government with war, Ahmet Davutoglu, a prominent Turkish strategist, and former Turkish prime minister has taken a more moderate stance, saying that although Turkey is objecting to Greek greed in the Mediterranean, it is not a good option to solve this problem. He believes in dialogue between the parties and a diplomatic solution to the issue [35].

4.3.2. Ownership of Islands

Islands are places that have a strategic position. Strategic points have a unique communication role that is a function of strategy and technology development. However, the value of strategic points is not the same because some have military value, some economic, some political and social, and others have a combined value. The critical points of the world always coincide with the strategic points. Strategic points play a significant role both in times of peace and in times of war. The strategic islands of Cyprus and Kastellorizo, which are disputed by Greece and Turkey, are no exception to this rule, as will be examined below.

A. Cyprus Island

The island of Cyprus, now known as the Republic of Cyprus, has an area of 9,252 square kilometers and a population of 1,103,467, neighboring Turkey to the north, Egypt to the south, Syria to the east, and Greece to the west. Cyprus is an island where linguistic divisions are completely intertwined with inter-sectarian religious differences. In essence, there was a conflict over an island strategically located in the eastern Mediterranean between Greek-speaking Orthodox Christians, who make up 81.9 percent, and Turkic-speaking Muslims, who make up 18.1 percent of the population (Figure 5). Cyprus was originally a colony of ancient Greece. But Greek domination of Cyprus was not very stable, as the island was coveted by various empires due to its strategic position. For instance, until 1571, the island went hand in hand between different empires, including Britain and the Ottoman Empire. The island was part of the Ottoman Empire until the mid-nineteenth century. But in 1878, it came under the Great British rule [30]. The Greeks and the Turks of Cyprus had a very good friendly relationship during British colonial rule. In such a way that their villages were mixed. They shared schools and even attended each other's parties and weddings. However, with the withdrawal of Britain and the independence of Cyprus, the two groups started opposing each other [51] due to the territorial interventions of Greece and Turkey because the two intervening countries, while fully aware of the strategic position of the island, considered its unilateral domination as dominance over the eastern

Mediterranean. This effort has so far not only been fruitless for both sides but has divided this strategic island into two northern and southern opposing parts. Disagreement over the fate of Cyprus is not only the most important dispute between Turkey and Greece but also one of the most important conflicts between Turkey and the European Union. Greece wants to reclaim the island, while Turkey is committed to defending the rights of minorities. Cyprus was part of the Ottoman Empire for over three centuries. Early Greek Cypriots welcomed British domination of the island in 1878 because the British ended their status as a minority, and they mistakenly believed that with the help of the British, the island would soon join Greece [43].

Figure 5. *Island of Cyprus (Ghasemi, 2009: 80).*

At the same time, the Turkish-speaking Cypriot minority called on the British and Turkish governments to support them. In the 1950s. several Greek Cypriots formed a guerrilla movement to drive Britain out of Cyprus and unite the island with Greece. Britain, on the other hand, was willing to leave the island only if Greece and Turkey agreed to the island's independence. In 1960, the Republic of Cyprus gained independence. But never acted as an independent state because there was disagreement about how and to what extent the Greeks and Turks exercised power. In 1963, there was a war between the Turks and the Greeks of Cyprus. Nicosia, the capital of Cyprus, became a divided city and a symbol of discord. The Greeks moved from the predominantly Turkish areas to the Greek settlements, and the Turks moved to the Turkish settlements. The United Nations sent 7,000 peacekeepers. After a decade, the island was divided into two quasi-states because all the ports and roads and most of the island's revenue were in the hands of the Greek region, and the Turkic region was less developed [26].

In 1974, the Greek elements of the island unilaterally united the island of Cyprus with the mainland of Greece during a coup. Their action was responded to by the Turkish government [43]. The Turkish authorities, who did not want to lose to the Greek elements of the island and their Greek supporter in this geopolitical rivalry in the eastern Mediterranean, immediately sent troops to the Turkish Cypriot part and geopolitically challenged their rival. The Turkish government set an attack with 30,000 Turkish troops a few days later and took control of about 40 percent of the northern part of the island. Over 150,000 Greek Cypriots were forced to give up their homes, farms, and jobs and flee south (the Greek part of the island). Several thousand Turks also migrated and settled in the evacuated areas. The Turkish government is in favor of a dual federal state with a weak central government. In addition, the Turkish Cypriot proposal is a confederate model with two independent states on the island. This model also fulfills the aspirations of both sides for sovereignty by itself. At the same time, it provides mechanisms for the link between the two nations and the island state based on agreed powers and responsibilities. The issues that they will agree on include a joint delegation, including the European Union and, of course, the United Nations, and any other issues that may be faced by them. At the same time, it provides an opportunity for governments, and developing countries, if they wish, to establish relations with other countries and other institutions around the world

[46]. The Greeks, on the other hand, agree in principle with the creation of a federal state, but do not accept territorial division in a way that the Turks prefer. Another dispute is how power is divided because what was left to the Cypriots was much less than what was given to the Greek Cypriots. What was left to the Cypriots were: the vice president, three members of the seven-member cabinet, 30 percent of parliamentary seats, 40 percent of military officials, and 30 percent of government officials. Therefore, if the federal solution is accepted and the Turkish army withdraws from the island, the problem of integration will remain unresolved.

In 1983, the Turkish Cypriots unilaterally announced the formation of a new independent government on the island called the "Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus". Strong international opposition, especially from the Greek Cypriots, to the movement led many governments to not recognize it diplomatically [40]. Twenty years later, despite tensions between the northern and southern parts of Cyprus, the Turkish part voted in favor of the Cyprus reunification program in 2004, but when the European Union confirmed the Greek Cypriot membership in May 2004, the possibility of Turkish-Greek Cypriot coexistence in a single country was eliminated. Greek Cypriot membership in the European Union marks a turning point in the history of Cyprus since its independence in the 1960s [44]. The sensitivity of the Cyprus issue to Turkey is so great that it has also affected Turkey's membership in the European Union. Hence, the European Union wants Turkey to leave Northern Cyprus and not support the Turkish residents [45].

B. Kastellorizo Island

Unlike Cyprus, which is an independent, two-part country on the political map of the world and a member of the United Nations, Kastellorizo is a Greek-owned island and part of the country's geographical territory. The official name of the island is Megisti, but the Greek name Kastellorizo is more famous and everyone calls this island by this name. The island is located 2 km off the south coast of Turkey and 570 km southeast of Athens. Kastellorizo is a Greek island and an urban area of Dodecanese in the eastern Mediterranean, located in the southern Aegean province of Greece. Kastellorizo has an area of about 10 km and a population of fewer than 1000 people is like a point on the map of the Mediterranean Sea (Figure 6). Kastellorizo means "red castle" in Greek because the island is seen in red at the sunset horizon. This island, which the Turks call "Ghezel Hesar" or "Miss", is an attractive place. With a tumultuous history and frequent exchanges between the Byzantine Empire, Malta, the Ottoman Empire, etc., Kastellorizo was recaptured in 1974 from defeated Italy in World War II, and the victors of the war ceded its ownership to Greece. However, the problem of island ownership was not guaranteed forever [20]. The island, known as the key to Turkish and Greek ambitions in the eastern Mediterranean, is still disputed due to its strategic location. The Turks are reluctant to accept Greek rule over Kastellorizo because of the island's proximity to the coast, which is about the size of a swimming pool, and its rich energy resources. What has made Turkey more sensitive and worrying is the support of EU and US members for the Greek government. The European Union and the United States support the Greek government in what they call Turkey's "geopolitical territory building" in the eastern Mediterranean to make greater use of the region's energy resources [36].

Figure 6. *Kastellorizo Island.*

A look at the map above shows that Kastellorizo is very far from Mainland Greece, as well as from other Greek islands in the Aegean Sea, but it is very close to Turkey. This situation was not a problem until something happened on the border between Turkey's common coastline and Kastellorizo on the high seas. However, the discovery of oil and gas resources in the eastern Mediterranean and their exploitation led to geopolitical rivalry between Turkey and Greece. Greece refers to the 1982 Montego Bay Convention on the Law of the Sea to defend its rights. According to the convention, countries rule the sea up to 12 nautical miles (22 km) from their shores, and this is the "territorial sea". Following the territorial sea, a monitoring area is about 12 nautical miles. Then, there is an exclusive economic zone, which is about 200 nautical miles from the baseline to the sea [16]. Singing the 1982 Maritime Convention, Greece claims that the island of Kastellorizo should have the right to rule 200 nautical miles south of the waters. The line that the Greeks are considering for the ownership of Kastellorizo water and by connecting it to some lines related to their other islands in the Eastern Mediterranean, indicates that they want a plan to halve Turkey's monopoly zone. Not only will the Turks not succumb to it, but even consider Greece's ownership of the island of Kastellorizo a historic injustice. Ankara argues that the Rhodes to Kastellorizo line closes on the Turkish coastline and that the line between Kastellorizo and Egypt (corresponding to Greek-Cypriot Free Zone) restricts the Turkish sea. Turkey also says that Kastellorizo's proximity prevents Ankara from

exercising its rights in its maritime area [29].

4.3.3. Dispute over How to Use Energy Resources

The energy resources of the Mediterranean Sea, located in the east of this sea, although came to the attention of the countries of the region later than other regions, have led to geopolitical rivalry between Turkey, Greece, Cyprus, and Israel over the past decade. The history of the exploration of energy resources in the eastern Mediterranean dates back to the 1990s and the Israeli regime. But Israel gave it up because of internal problems and regional rivalries. Since December 2010 when the Middle Eastern countries were involved in the Arab Spring, Israel seized the opportunity to pursue the idea of extracting and exporting natural gas with two Greek and Italian companies. In early 2020, Israel signed the EastMed gas pipeline contract with a length of a 1,900-kilometer and capital of more than $6 billion with Greece and the Greek part of the island of Cyprus. The move angered Ankara. Following the signing of this contract, Turkey, to defend its national interests in the Eastern Mediterranean, sent several exploratory ships and several warships to the shores of the Turkish part of the island of Cyprus and the waters under its supervision and its special economic zone in the Eastern Mediterranean and established its presence in the region which refers to the “Water Homeland; under the military doctrine of the Turks [19]. When discovering the regional intentions of Turkey, the main players in the region decided to confront them. In September 2020, the governments of Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Italy, Greece, and Cyprus formally met in Cairo and formally established the East Mediterranean Gas Forum to enhance regional cooperation and joint efforts to exploit offshore gas resources [47]. The Forum seeks to remove Turkey from the energy equations of the Eastern Mediterranean. The most important member of the Forum, which strongly supported the elimination of Turkey, was Greece. The Greeks, in collaboration with Italy, Israel, and Egypt, sought to limit Turkey to their peripheral coasts as much as possible and to minimize its geopolitical influence in the eastern Mediterranean. The extent to which this collective action is effective depends on Turkey's internal developments and regional policies.

Despite not bordering the eastern Mediterranean, the United States, Russia, Britain, France, and Italy also seek to maintain their influence in the region [48]. Turkey entered the Libyan civil war and signed a continental shelf agreement with the Libyan government to stop the EastMed gas pipeline. Thus, this pipeline will be implemented only if either Turkey and Libya ignore the agreement or give Turkey a share in this pipeline. Under the Turkish agreement with the Libyan National Accord government, Turkish companies gained access to Libya's fuel field and the right to drill oil wells in Libya. This agreement resulted in the weakening of the French company Total, which imposed huge economic losses on the French fuel sector. This led to France engaging in saber-rattling against Turkey. In 2020, as tensions between Turkey and Greece escalated, France sent the Charles de Gaulle warship against Turkey into the Mediterranean. During these tensions, France's stance against Turkey was so sharp that it met with a reaction from Ankara. According to Emmanuel Macron, Turkey is ambitious in the eastern Mediterranean because of the illusion of reviving the Ottoman Caliphate and benefits from the withdrawal of the United States and NATO from the region. For France, Turkey is no longer a partner in the Eastern Mediterranean, and Europe must act in concert to counter Turkey [23].

The United States also has indirect interests in the eastern Mediterranean. The EU energy market is of interest to the United States. Thus, the prospect of exporting energy from the Eastern Mediterranean to Europe is not pleasant for the United States. On the other hand, Washington is concerned about increasing Russia's geopolitical influence in the eastern Mediterranean. That is why it intends to use the capacity of Greece, Cyprus, and Israel to manage the energy of this region. Thus, the Eastern Mediterranean is gradually becoming a political and military polarization centered on the United States and Russia. Accordingly, Turkey has better relations with Russia and Greece with the United States. EU members also have no common position on tensions between Turkey and Greece because, on one hand, they consider themselves obliged to defend Greece as the resurrection of the democracy of Western civilization and a member of the European Union, and on the other hand, membership in NATO and Turkey's presence in this treaty obliges them to defend Turkey in the event of any military conflict. Accordingly, several EU members, including Germany, are seeking diplomacy with Turkey. The European market needs for energy resources in the Eastern Mediterranean, on the one hand, and the unfavorable economic situation of the beneficiary countries, on the other, have created aggravating conditions that can lead to tensions. Given these circumstances, the European Union, like the United States, is on the verge of a confrontation with Turkey [32]. In general, given that tensions between Turkey and Greece over energy resources in the Eastern Mediterranean have intensified in the last two years, the situation could become more complicated than in the past. However, a war in the eastern Mediterranean between Turkey and Greece seems highly unlikely. According to David Kurani, as the energy potential in the eastern Mediterranean increases, so does the potential for conflicts over resources. To reduce this potential, the United States and the European Union must play a more active role in reducing escalating tensions in the region through two key channels of diplomacy. For example, the United States and the European Union should re-engage in Cyprus to facilitate a private dialogue between the Greeks and Cypriots on the development of energy resources and to work for a settlement of the Israeli-Lebanese maritime border dispute [41].

4.3.4. The issue of the Minority of Western Thrace and the Christian Greeks on Both Sides of the Border

Countries and governments try to challenge their rival geopolitically to hit or limit their maneuvering power and action. In fact, the primary goal of any geopolitical challenge is to create passivity on the other side to change its behavior.

To do this, they use different tools and methods. One of these tools is the use of ethnic-spatial groups against each other [6]. The same is true for ethnic and religious minorities on both sides of the border in Turkey and Greece. Western Thrace is a geographical and historical region in Greece, between the rivers Nestos and Maritsa in the northeast of the country, and covers the provinces of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace (Figure 7). The issue of Western Thrace dates back to the end of World War I and the signing of the Lausanne Treaty in 1923. As a result of the population exchange between Greece and Turkey, a Turkic-speaking and Muslim minority is still living in western Thrace. Turkey says there are 150,000 Turks living in the region and is seeking Greek recognition as a "Turkish minority and full rights". But the Greek government says they are 120,000 Greek Muslims, referring to the group as a "Muslim minority" [28], and warns the Turkish government that it will never allow it to be exploited in the form of geopolitical affiliations and engender Greece's national security. However, the Turkish government accuses the Greek government of violating the rights of the Turks, saying that under the Lausanne agreement, the Greek government's actions violate the legal status of the inhabitants of Western Thrace, which is located between the two countries.

Figure 7. *Western Thrace in Greece.*

Ankara officials say they respect all the rights of Christian Turks of Greek descent in the country, and they are free to choose their priests, Greek names, and other rights. In contrast, the Greek government violates the rights of Turkish Turks by preventing the appointment of a mufti and deleting Turkish names, thereby separating them from the culture of their homeland. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan - during a meeting with his Greek counterpart Procopius Paulopoulos in 2017 in Athens, stated: "Everyone is talking about the Treaty of Lausanne. But the Treaty will not be implemented". "According to statistics, the per capita national income of every Greek citizen is about $18,000 a year, and this figure is about $2,200 for the people of western Thrace", Erdogan said. The necessary investment support has not been provided and discrimination is prevalent there. In Turkey, this is not the case for Roman citizens. No one can see the slightest discrimination in their places of worship, but in Western Thrace, it is not even possible to write the word Turk. The Greek authorities were so strict with the Turkish minority in western Thrace that some of them were forced to emigrate to Turkey. Immigration to Turkey was not a new phenomenon for the minority population of Western Thrace. According to Tuzon Bachli, the migration process to Turkey has been continuous. From 1939 to 1951, approximately 20,000 people moved to Turkey, followed by another 20,000 during the 1950s. However, from the 1960s onward, the Turkish government did not allow immigrants from western Thrace to reside and work, so it became very difficult for them to settle in Turkey. The main reason for this policy was that the Turkish government wanted to maintain a large minority in northern Greece that could be exploited for political gain. For this reason, the Turkish authorities tolerated or even supported some extremist Turkish organizations in Turkey, such as the Istanbul-based Western Thrace Solidarity Association[2], which demanded the independence of Western Thrace. Both Turkish and Greek scholars have written about this policy. For example, Tuzon Bahceli says that the migration of Muslim Turks from Greece to Turkey has continued to this day. The Turkish government does not encourage such immigration and usually does not grant citizenship to immigrants. However, it is feared that this continued migration will pave the way for the disappearance of society in Greece [24].

Contrary to the claims of the Turkish authorities about Western Thrace, Greece is also promoting the rights of Greek

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Christians to challenge the Turkish government geopolitically. After the establishment of the Republic of Turkey in 1924, Christians, especially Greek Orthodox Christians, experienced bitter events in 1933, 1955, and 1964. Turkish Christian minorities in various Turkish cities, especially Istanbul, have churches and educational centers and engage in religious activities, yet they believe the government is refusing to return some of their previously confiscated religious and cultural sites. The Greek minority has repeatedly criticized the obstacles that Turkey poses to teaching Greek in the country and the Turkish part of Cyprus. The issue has also provoked protests from the Greek government and the Greek Cypriot sector. One example of a violation of the rights of Greek Christian minorities is the "codification of non-Muslims" in Turkey, which dates back to 1924 beginning with the directives issued in 1983 and 2001 and continuing so far. These directives emphasize the need to provide information on registration documents to the heirs of persons who had been forced to migrate before 1924 [17]. From the protesters' point of view, the Turkish government used non-Muslim coding to separate them from the Turks. Second, it has taxed minorities and, ultimately, prevented them from being employed in government jobs. Contrary to the protesters' view, the Turkish authorities insist that the codes are not intended to enumerate religious minorities and are used to enroll their children in minority schools, as well as to conduct related administrative work. However, Greek Christians say Turkey is using the coding scheme to impose more restrictions and confiscate their properties. In addition, the use of confidential or non-confidential codes to identify an individual is contrary to human rights standards, including the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child and the 1992 UN General Assembly Declaration on Minorities [13].

4.3.5. Greece's Support for the Turkish Opposition

Rival states do not shy away from challenging each other with any geographical variable that can serve their national interests. Internal opposition is one of these variables that has played a vital role in the conflict between the powers. This variable is most effective when the opposition seeks geographical divergence and the formation of an autonomous political climate within the mother country or an independent geopolitical entity on the political map of the world. Despite its strong appearance due to a strong army and NATO membership, Turkey is highly vulnerable in its political structure. This problem has deprived Turkey of the security it needs to develop and has hindered Turkey's joining the European Union. Turkey's political structure has been undermined due to the ideology that has caused the crisis in Turkey [52] and the issue of ethnicity, which is the driver of divergence in this Eurasian country. The activities of the leftist groups in Turkey peaked in the 1970s and 1960s. they did not have a good relationship with the Turkish government and took armed actions. The Marxist-Leninist Communist Workers' Party and the Turkish Kurdistan Workers' Party are among these left-wing groups that have been struggling with the Ankara government since the 1970s motivated by their sociopolitical interests. The Marxist-Leninist Communist Workers' Party is a Maoist communist political party in Turkey founded in 1972 by a group of former members of the Turkish Workers' and Peasants' Revolutionary Movement led by Ibrahim Kaipak Kaya, who is waging an armed struggle based on the Maoist military strategy of the People's War against the Ankara government. However, the Kurdistan Workers' Party also emerged as a divergent force in the mid-1970s. It was formed by Abdullah Ocalan, seeking to establish at least one Kurdish autonomous region in the east and southeast of Turkey [5]. The Turkish government's declaration of war on these parties and the attempt to arrest their leaders and supporters led them to flee Turkey to neighboring countries that do not have good relations with Turkey. One of these neighboring countries is Greece, which after the independence of Turkey in 1924 has taken every opportunity to challenge Ankara. To challenge Ankara geopolitically, Greece put on its agenda the support of the Kurds and the left, and later the Turkish coup. This action received a negative reaction from Ankara. The Marxist-Leninist Communist Workers' Party still hides most of its leaders and cadres in Greece. In addition to the Communist Party, the PKK has always been active in Greece, and Abdullah Ocalan, the PKK leader, lived for a while in Greece after being expelled from Syria. According to Turkish officials, the members of leftist terrorist and PKK groups, calling themselves refugees, are organizing their terrorist activities against Turkey in many Greek cities.

In addition to these two groups, some agents of the 2016 Turkish coup and supporters of Fethullah Gulen also live in and are supported by Greece. The Greek government has always denied supporting these groups and rejects the Turkish accusations against it. Thus, to resolve this issue, the Turkish government has sought to sign a security agreement with Greece in recent years to repatriate perpetrators of terrorist acts and to restrict the activities of these groups. The evidence shows that not only Greece but even Belgium, Germany, and the Netherlands, which are considered to be important centers of the PKK activities have rejected such an agreement. Therefore, the Turkish-Greek disputes have remained unresolved [12]. In 2019, in a visit to Ankara by the Greek Prime Minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan formally asked him to prevent turning Greece into a haven for terrorist groups such as Foto, the PKK, and the 2016 coup plotter and extradite them to the Turkish government. However, Greece not only ignores such a request, but considers it a weakness on the part of Turkey and will exploit it as much as possible because the Greek officials are well aware that the President of Turkey is pursuing regional goals, and to be able to challenge regionalism, one of the important variables is the exploitation of the above groups.

4.3.6. The Arrival of Asylum Seekers from Turkey to Greece

Another geopolitical challenge between Turkey and Greece is the common border between the two countries. Border crossings, whether legal or illegal, are typically rooted in economic and historical ties that create problems for two

neighboring countries that are not on good terms with each other and have geopolitical challenges. Turkey shares a 206-square-kilometer border with Greece. Despite the positive economic, political, and cultural functions that the border between the two countries can have [8], what makes the border between the two countries challenging is its negative functions, i.e. smuggling and illegal crossing. The border is a barrier to the movement of people and goods, and it creates problems in managing and exploiting resources, sometimes leading to disputes between the two governments. The disputes may be over legal or illegal border crossing procedures. Currently, the dispute over the functions of the border is more about the illegal crossing of asylum seekers. For instance, the illegal crossing of tens of thousands of North Korean nationals to China from the border between the two countries has adversely affected bilateral relations between Beijing and Pyongyang [16]. But unlike China and North Korea, the border issue between Turkey and Greece is not about Turkish citizens crossing into Greece, but the main issue is illegal crossings of citizens of other countries, including Syrians, from Turkey to Greece.

There are two main routes for illegal smuggling from Turkey to Greece: One is crossing the land border on foot across the Urus River, and the other is crossing by boat from Turkey to the islands of the Eastern Aegean Sea or mainland Greece. Over the past two decades, Turkey, Greece, and other Balkan countries have increasingly faced large-scale involuntary migrations, usually to the EU [3]. For the last half-century, the Turkish-Greek border has always been the gateway for illegal immigrants from South Asia and the Middle East to Europe, and this has not been very challenging and has not attracted much attention. What turned these illegal crossing into a regional and sometimes international challenge was the issue of the 2010 Arab Spring followed by the outbreak of the civil war in Syria in 2011. After the war in Syria and the flight of the people from this country, Turkey was the first country that formally sheltered a large number of Syrian immigrants by implementing the policy of open borders. At the beginning of the arrival of a large number of immigrants outside the borders of Syria and for six months, Turkey settled a large number of Syrian immigrants in its camps [9]. Despite the humanitarian action taken by the Turkish government against the Syrian refugees, it can be said that in line with its international obligations and with the cooperation of international organizations, the Turkish government could overcome the problems of the Syrian refugees in the field of services as much as possible. However, the violent actions of the Turkish military against the Syrian immigrants, including women and children, to prevent them from entering Turkey and returning them to the war-torn areas, caused the Syrian immigrants to enter Europe via Greece [42]. "Another concern of the Turkish government about Syrian refugees was the employment and education of refugees in Turkey", said Turkish researcher Şahizer Samuk. Because these two issues required the formulation of a strategy that was costly for the Ankara government given the country's economic situation. Therefore, providing the ground for their migration to Greece and their entry into the territory of the European Union was the only measure that could reduce the concerns of the Turkish authorities [49].

The Greek government provided some services to asylum seekers, but the influx of migrants was so great that it built a 12.5-kilometer border wall on the border with Turkey and diverted asylum seekers to Western Europe. The influx of immigrants to Western Europe, including Germany, which was a major destination for asylum seekers, and the problems they faced, was widely reflected on an international and global scale. The European Union immediately called on Greece to close its borders to asylum seekers. However, the Greek government, despite building a border wall, could not prevent asylum seekers from entering EU territory, and the only way for the EU, including Greece, was to ask the Turkish government for help. The Turkish government, as in the past, refused to cooperate with the European Union and Greece in preventing asylum seekers from moving to Europe, subject to concessions. Turkey asked for financial assistance from the European Union to resettle refugees on its territory, and also called the European Union to cover up Turkey's invasion of Syrian territory, support for extremist groups, and the killing of Syrian citizens, including Kurds in northern and northeastern Syria [38].

Despite EU financial aid to Turkey and European indifference to the occupation of Syria and their genocide by Turkey, the Ankara authorities not only do not prevent asylum seekers from entering Europe through Greece but also use asylum seekers as leverage whenever they have problems with Greece and Europe. In response to Ankara's abuse, the Greek government has put on its agenda the expansion of its 40-kilometer border wall with Turkey in 2020 to prevent asylum seekers from entering the country. Greek action is not limited to the land border because of the Greek government in January 2020 announced that it would set up a "floating security system" to prevent migrants from entering its maritime borders with Turkey. According to officials, the floating system will be used in "emergencies". Undoubtedly, illegal crossings from the land and sea border between Turkey and Greece seems to remain an unsolvable challenge [22], as Turkish officials, including President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, have recently threaten Europe in scornful tone to send more than two million migrants to Europe by opening land and sea borders if they consider the Turkish government's actions in the region, including in Syria (northern Syria) and Iraq as invasive actions. Thus, the illegal crossing of asylum seekers across the border and its security consequences for both sides, including Greece and the European Union, have prevented the two neighboring countries in the eastern Mediterranean from interacting constructively with each other, leading to a geopolitical challenge. In general, despite the serious threats made by Recep Tayyip Erdogan and other Turkish political and military leaders against Greece and Europe, the main strategy adopted by the Turkish government is to resolve the issues between them through diplomacy because the Turks consider that having close ties with the West, especially their membership in the European Union, can serve their national

interests; A goal that is not impossible to achieve, but is very difficult, costly, and time-consuming.

5. Conclusion

Turkey and Greece are two European countries in the Eastern Mediterranean competing geopolitically. Although the history of the Athens-Ankara dispute dates back to the Ottoman caliphate, relations between the two countries have become more challenging in recent years. The Greeks revolted against the Ottomans in 1821 and gained independence in 1829. The second confrontation was between Turkey and Greece happened from 1922 to 1919. The Greeks sought to annex Western Anatolia to Greece because according to the Treaty of Sèvres, Greece, in addition to Western Thrace, gained control over Eastern Thrace, that is, about forty kilometers from Istanbul. The city of Izmir and its suburbs also came under Greek rule for five years, after which it could join Greece if the people so wished. The last stage of the Turkish war with Greece was in August 1922. Turkish forces first entered Izmir. With the surrender of the Allied forces, a ceasefire agreement was signed in October 1922, according to which the Turkish rule in Istanbul, Boğazı, and Eastern Thrace was agreed upon by the Allies and the Greeks. After the signing of the Lausanne Treaty, the Republic of Turkey declared independence in 1924. After World War II, the rivalry between Turkey and Greece entered a new phase. The first challenge was the issue of the territorial sea. The hypothetical midline between Greece and Turkey in the Aegean Sea and the Mediterranean is so close to the Turkish coast that it gives most of the ownership of the sea to Greece. Under the 1982 Convention on the Sea, Greece grants the right to a 12-mile territorial sea to its own islands in the Mediterranean Sea near the mainland of Turkey. This claim deprives Turkey of the right to a territorial sea in its homeland and encloses it in the Gulf of Antalya. The islands of Cyprus and Kastellorizo are also the focus of geopolitical rivalry between Turkey and Greece. Cyprus became independent in 1960. However, in the mid-1970s, Greek agents on the island united Cyprus with mainland Greece through a coup. Their move provoked a reaction from Turkey.

Kastellorizo is located 2 km off the south coast of Turkey and 570 km southeast of Athens. Ownership of the island in 1947 was given to Greece. Greece says Kastellorizo should have sovereignty over 12 nautical miles to southern waters. But the Turks do not accept this claim. Eastern Mediterranean energy resources have also led to geopolitical rivalries and in some cases regional rivalries between Turkey, Greece, Cyprus, and Israel over the past decade. Turkey consolidated its presence in the Eastern Mediterranean by sending several warships to defend its interests in the eastern Mediterranean after signing the EastMed gas pipeline agreement. In response, the governments of Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Italy, Greece, and Cyprus established the “Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum” in Cairo intending to work together to exploit offshore gas. In the dispute between Greece and Turkey over the energy resources of the Eastern Mediterranean, the European powers, the United States, and Russia are each acting in their interests. The issue of the minority of Western Thrace and the Christian Greeks on both sides of the border is another geopolitical challenge between Turkey and Greece. The Turkish government accuses Greece of violating the rights of Turks and says the Greek government is violating the rights of Turks in Thrace. Greece, on the other hand, is violating the rights of Greek Christians. The Turkish opposition and Athens' support for them are other geopolitical challenges. To challenge Ankara geopolitically, Greece put on its agenda the support of the Kurds and the leftist movement, and later the Turkish coup plotters. Turkey's latest geopolitical challenge with Greece is the common border between the two countries. The illegal crossing of asylum seekers from the border between the two countries is another challenging issue. Following our discussions, it can be argued that given the role of geopolitical factors in the relations between the two countries, resolving the disputes between the two countries is a time-consuming and challenging task.

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