Navigating the Eastern Mediterranean

Interest-formation & State-action: Egypt, Israel, Turkey & the Republic of Cyprus

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Abstract

This study examines interest-formation and state-action in the Eastern Mediterranean countries of Egypt, Israel, Turkey and the Republic of Cyprus. In seeking answers to the questions on how interests of the respective countries can be explained, particularly within the area of natural gas, and possible consequences of different regional approaches, the study draws upon ideas in classical, structural, neoclassical realism and constructivism. The theoretical diversity enables the study to focus on international, state and domestic levels by way of qualitative content analysis as the selected methodology. The findings suggest that Egypt, Israel and Cyprus possess corresponding views in their regional outlook; including natural gas as a means for stability and economic growth, but also that these views contrast significantly with Turkey’s regional perspective. Additional findings show that interest-formation in all four states, despite coherence among Egypt, Israel and Cyprus, differentiates to a large degree. The chief reason is that interest-formation appears to occur within international, state and domestic levels. Regarding the second question, the study finds that the different and often conflicting regional approaches on natural gas of Cyprus and Turkey, which are based upon fundamentally different premises, pose risk for heightened tensions between both Cyprus, Turkey and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus.

Keywords: Eastern Mediterranean, Turkey, Cyprus, Israel, Egypt, Energy politics, Natural gas,

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### Abbreviations and acronyms

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AIOC</td>
<td>Anglo-Iranian Oil Company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AKP</td>
<td>Justice and Development Party (Turkey)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHP</td>
<td>Republican People’s Party (Turkey)</td>
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<tr>
<td>EEZ</td>
<td>Exclusive Economic Zone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EMG</td>
<td>East Mediterranean Gas Company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EOKA</td>
<td>Ethniki Organosis Kyprion Agонiston/National Organization of Cypriot Fighters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
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<tr>
<td>FETÖ</td>
<td>Fethullahçı Terör Örgütü/Gulenist Terror Organization (designated by Turkey)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HDP</td>
<td>People’s Democratic Party (Turkey)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICJ</td>
<td>International Court of Justice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MFA</td>
<td>Ministry of Foreign Affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MIDOR</td>
<td>Middle East Oil Refinery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MHP</td>
<td>Nationalist Movement Party (Turkey)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MSC</td>
<td>Munich Security Conference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAM</td>
<td>The Non-Aligned Movement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCR</td>
<td>Neoclassical Realism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TPAO</td>
<td>Turkish Petroleum Corporation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TRNC</td>
<td>Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PKK</td>
<td>Kurdistan Workers’ Party (Turkey)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRIO CC</td>
<td>Peace Research Institute Oslo - Cyprus Centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
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<td>USA</td>
<td>United States of America</td>
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1. Introduction

The Eastern Mediterranean has historically been important because of its geographical position as a gateway to the eastern areas of the Eurasian continent (Esber, 2018). In recent years, the region has gained attention due to discoveries of natural gas in the waters off the coasts of Israel, Egypt and The Republic of Cyprus.

Discoveries were first made in 2009 within Israel’s Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), followed by discoveries in the Republic of Cyprus’s (henceforth Cyprus) EEZ in 2011 and 2018 and Egypt in 2015. Israel has developed one field, the Tamar-field, which supplies Israel with energy. For Cyprus, the area within its EEZ that is believed to contain additional resources has been divided into twelve blocks where licenses have been given to a number of international companies (Elinas, 2017). The field discovered within the Egyptian EEZ, named Zohr is the largest field to have been discovered in the Mediterranean. It saw its first gas extracted in December 2017 and by the end of 2018, Egypt is set to be self-sufficient with hopes to start exporting gas by 2021 (Elinas, 2017).

Israel, Egypt and Cyprus view the potential of natural gas as beneficial for the region. For Cyprus the gas is seen as transformative for its geo-strategic position by its political leaders, who see an increased opportunity to actively contribute to stability in the Easter Mediterranean (Anastasiades, 2017), (Syllouris, 2017), (Lakkotrypis, 2017). The government looks to strengthen Cyprus relations with its regional neighbors (Anastasiades, 2017) and in this context has concluded agreements with Israel, Egypt and Lebanon on their respective EEZ’s.

Turkey remains excluded from any of these regional dialogues. It supports the internationally unrecognized Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) following the 1974 war and division of the island (Natural Gas World, 2018). Ankara and TRNC opposes Cyprus’s right to explore, extract natural gas and to sign bilateral agreements. Turkey also claim a part of the Cypriot EEZ southwest off the island, including a portion of some maritime blocks, arguing it belongs to its continental shelf, and is intent on defending Turkish and Turkish-Cypriot rights by any means necessary (Agdemir, 2016, p. 113-115). In February
of 2018, Turkish warships prevented the drillship *Saipem 1200*, leased by Italian energy company ENI to conduct drilling activities in Cyprus’s block 3 (Natural Gas World, 2018).

The research problem is drawn from what Cyprus, Israel and Egypt publicly state; that natural gas is positive for stability and peace in the Eastern Mediterranean. Turkey, as mentioned above, has an opposing position which gives rise to the problem (Essaiasson, et. al. 2012, p. 29) on what is driving these contrasting positions. I have therefore decided to conduct a *theory-consuming* study on interest-formation and state-action of Egypt, Israel, Cyprus and Turkey, employing a theoretical framework drawn from the schools of *classical, structural and neoclassical realism* and *constructivism*. As the research forms its conclusions on interest-formation of these states, a secondary aim is to understand how Turkey’s and Cyprus’s approaches to natural gas in the Eastern Mediterranean can be understood in terms of stability and tensions between Cyprus, TRNC and Turkey.

**1.1 Aim and Research questions**

The overall aim of this work is to study interest-formation and state-action of Egypt, Israel, Cyprus and Turkey in the Eastern Mediterranean, particularly within the framework of natural gas. The analysis is conducted on three abstraction levels, derived from the theoretical frameworks *classical, structural and neoclassical realism* and *constructivism*.

To be able to reach these objectives, I have constructed the following research questions:

- How can the interests of Cyprus, Turkey, Israel and Egypt in the Eastern Mediterranean be individually explained?
- How can the respective approaches to natural gas resources, as undertaken by Cyprus and Turkey, be conceptualized in terms of stability in the Eastern Mediterranean?

The two questions above are of explanatory nature. The intention is to impose the theoretical framework and analyze strategically selected statements and speeches by way of *qualitative content analysis*. The study aim to have the theoretical frameworks to operate complementary to each other where their separate focuses on different levels of abstraction allow the analysis to consider a broad variety of aspects. It is my held perception that with the selected theoretical concept and this particular research design, the study ought to be capable to provide fruitful answers to the questions presented above.
The research was conducted with a *hypothesis* (Essaiasson, et. al. 2012, p. 38) that actions by the Republic of Cyprus in the field of natural gas, that is issuing licenses and negotiating bilateral agreements, create more tensions in the region given the opposition by Turkey and TRNC. I will confirm or discard this hypothesis in the concluding chapter of this thesis.

This thesis does not intend to argue that natural resources by definition constitute an obstacle to stability or peace. The aim is to study interest-formation of the states and arrive at a point where the research can draw reasonable conclusions and provide satisfying answers to the questions posed above.

Concerning internal scientific relevance, the thesis is intended to fill a gap in the existing research field in two aspects (Essaiasson, et. al. 2012, p. 31). By using material from the years 2016 to 2018, this study aims to present an up-to-date study on the current state of the region. Secondly, the thesis explores what seems to be absent in the academic literature; that is, how interest formation of Cyprus, Turkey, Israel and Egypt can be understood through the lenses of *constructivism, classical, structural and neoclassical realism*. As such, the intention is to contribute to the existing academic debate and literature on energy politics and interstate relations in the Eastern Mediterranean (Teorell & Svensson, 2007, p. 18).

As stated in the beginning of this work, the region has gained increased attention due to the discoveries of natural gas. By conducting this research, it is intended to contribute to the public debate by offering a sober, in-depth study into the matters of energy-politics and interest-formation in the Eastern Mediterranean (Teorell & Svensson, 2007, p. 18).

### 1.2 Existing research field

This part presents an overview of the existing academic research on politics and energy in the Eastern Mediterranean. The existing research field concerning politics of the Eastern Mediterranean is found in abundance in the academic literature. Emre Iseri and Panagiotis Andrikopoulos, in their study *Energy Geopolitics of the Eastern Mediterranean: Will Aphrodite’s Lure Fuel Peace in Cyprus* (2013), discuss whether partnership in the energy field can contribute to peace on the island. The study also explains the origin of the Israeli-Greek-Cypriot relations, arguing they should be seen against the backdrop of the deteriorated relations between Turkey and Israel. The souring of relations began after the rise of then
Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, his Justice and Development Party (AKP) in Turkey and the increased shift in Turkish foreign policy to elevate Turkey’s standing in the Middle East as the region constitutes a major export market for Turkey (Andrikopoulos & Iseri, 2013, p. 39).

The study concludes with an assessment that given the problems that exist between Turkey and Israel and Cyprus, predictions concerning natural gas are very difficult to make. It argues that the then newly elected government of Cyprus faced challenges to bring in revenue and to smooth over the issues with the Turkish Cypriots and Turkey (Andrikopoulos & Iseri, 2013, p. 42). It highlights the building of a pipeline from Israel to Turkey via Cyprus as the best option to facilitate dialogue and bring wealth to the entirety of the Cypriot island but given the existing rivalry in the region this was seen as unlikely. Answering whether the energy resources could bring peace to Cyprus, the study suggests that it depends on whether Turkey uses it’s capability to balance its security and energy interest in order to create conflict transformation, and to foster a Cypriot-Israeli-Turkish pipeline as a “peace pipeline” that can bring peace on the island (Andrikopoulos & Iseri, 2013, p. 42).

The study *Energy Discoveries in the Eastern Mediterranean: Conflict of Cooperation*, published in the journal *Middle East Policy* (2014), argues that the inclusion of international actors and multilateralization of monetization projects such as natural gas in the region would indicate that pursuits of *relative gains* are counterproductive (Grigoriadis, 2014, p. 124). The research brings forth the idea that natural gas could bring about a pursuit of national interests according to relative gains, but that the best policy option to realize absolute gains is to include Cyprus, Israel, Greece and Turkey as well as Lebanon, the Palestinian Authority and Syria (Grigoriadis, 2014, p. 124). The research concludes that natural gas is set to have a continued effect on the regional political economy, but that it was too early to estimate the total size of the energy resources in the region. Moreover, the research states that the third-party intervention is required in order to sort out the Cyprus problem, the delineations of EEZ’s and the improvement of Israeli-Turkish relations (Grigoriadis, 2014, p. 124).

In *A New Partnership in Eastern Mediterranean: The Growing Relations Between Israel and Greece* (2015), A. Murat Agdemir describes the relations between the two states in economic and military terms as well as Israel’s emerging relations with Cyprus. Its findings centers on Greece’s incentives to gain political and economic backing in its dispute with
Turkey over maritime borders in the Aegean Sea, hence the emerging relations between Greece and Israel (Agdemir, 2015, p. 67). With regards to Cyprus, the research’s findings discuss a possible emerging trilateral dialogue to constitute a major development in the countries’ regional position and strategic roles. However, this necessitates political and military effectiveness and progress in terms of cooperation (Agdemir, 2015, p. 67). In the conclusion, the study points to the possibility of restored relations between Israel and Turkey and a existing uncertainty of Turkish reactions towards a growing Israeli-Cypriot-Greek rapprochement where the established political, economic and military is inadequate to realize a strategic partnership (Agdemir, 2015, p. 67).

In *Turkish Foreign Policy and the Energy-bonanza in the Eastern Mediterranean*, Hasan Selim Özertem examines the impact of recent energy discoveries on Turkey’s foreign policy. He argues that its traditionally Cyprus-dominated foreign policy in the Eastern Mediterranean has begun to change and is now characterized by reactive measures in order to keep up with regional changes (Özertem, 2016, p. 361). The research study developments from 2000 and onwards through the scope of Turkish foreign policy and argues that instead of a reactive policy in the region, Turkey should improve its relations with the states in the region to prevent an emerging network or alliance opposed to its own regional interests. Its findings suggest that Turkey views the Cyprus issue through a perspective of sovereignty and as a guarantor power (Özertem, 2016, p. 362).

The research suggests that the energy resources have several implications on Turkish foreign policy being Turkish reactive moves to Cypriot exploration, for example, seismic research off the island and drilling an onshore well near Iskele/Trikomo in North Cyprus. It discusses traditional deterrence diplomacy employed by Turkey to halt the activities of international companies, a tactic argued to have fallen short of maintaining the status-quo onshore leading to a delineation with TRNC on their respective EEZ and its’ own seismic explorations Cyprus (Özertem, 2016, p. 370). The research argues that both the Greek-Cypriots and Turkey have negatively contributed to the peace process by escalating tensions and raising new obstacles. Turkey can therefore either continue to pursue policies of escalation that could push Israel, Egypt, Cyprus and Greece closer together, or it could normalize tensions with some of its neighbors Özertem, 2016, p. 370)
1.3 Disposition

Chapter one gives an introduction into the research topic, including aim of research and a presentation of the research questions and the hypothesis. It presents an overview of the existing research field. Chapter two introduces the selected theories for the research and starts with a section discussing their purpose and utilization. The chapter proceeds to present each theory in detail and concludes with defining their associated concepts. Chapter three contains methodology. The first section explains the general approach where a discussion on connectivity between theory, methodology and how this connectivity is sustained in the analysis through the usage of three abstraction levels. Reflections on practical considerations in qualitative research and objectivity are also present in this part. The chapter proceeds to present an outline of the method qualitative content analysis. The rest of the chapter includes operationalization of the theoretical concepts, a detailed outline of the analytical approach and limitations of the research. It concludes with a presentation and discussion of the selected material. Chapter four contains historical background. It begins with presenting general aims of the chapter before proceeding to outline the historical background of five states Egypt, Israel, Turkey, Cyprus and Iran, where the first four have been selected for analysis. Chapter five presents the analytical findings of the research. The chapter is divided into three main sections according to the three different abstraction levels. In each section, the findings of the respective states are presented individually. Chapter six contains the concluding result where the two research questions and the hypothesis are revisited, answered upon and discussed.

2. Theoretical and conceptual frameworks

As noted in the previous chapters, this study aims to explain how interests are formed and pursued by Egypt, Israel, Cyprus and Turkey in the Eastern Mediterranean. To be able to offer an adequate explanation on what these interests are and how they are formed, a demand arises to make use of theoretical frameworks that focuses on multiple aspects of international relations. As the research’s focus is on states and how they form their interests, I decided to make use constructivism and three forms of realism: classical, structural and neo-classical realism (NCR). A framework based upon these theories seems reasonable as they tackle questions on international politics on separate abstraction levels with both different focus and
ontological standpoints. Therefore, they are intended to work complementary to each other in a division of labour (Reus-Smit, 2013, p. 230).

In analyzing the selected material, the classical realist perspective provides the ability to take traditional realist aspects of international relations into account, such as power and national interest. Structural realism follows the basic conceptions of classical realist thought, but offers the ability to study aspects of state-action, for example balancing efforts and forms of cooperation being informal or formal alliances, alignments or agreements.

NCR has as its aim to understand state action. It accepts the basic realist assumptions on the anarchic state, the importance of relative power and the ideas about the state. It includes in its analysis individual, state and system-level variables (Donnelly, 2013, p. 45). As such, what is of consideration in the analysis is identification of ideas issued by national leaders about other states as well as efforts of cooperation between states and national history. The systemic and holistic levels of constructivism allows for the ability to analyze, similarly as NCR, both the international and domestic domains. The power of constructivism lies in its importance of the social aspects of politics and identity. It allows for a study into the appearance of norms, how identity is perceived, the presence of ideology, culture and perceptions of friendship and enmity.

2.1 Classical realism

Realism is said to be the oldest theory in international relations. Its foundations can be traced back throughout the centuries to political thinkers such as Thucydides and his literary work The History of the Peloponnesian War, Niccolo Machiavelli and The Prince and Thomas Hobbes’s Leviathan (Donnelly, 2013, p. 33).

State-centrism and the rationality of states are trademarks of the realist tradition. However, realism is not alone in holding these premises to be important. What distinguishes realism is its assumption that the international system is anarchical and that all actors within the system are egoistic. Classical realism has traditionally concerned itself with the notion of human nature, which it argues to be selfish and disreputable. In this light, Morgenthau, one of the classical realist thinkers, argued that the social world is nothing but an extension of the human nature onto the collective (Donnelly, 2013, p. 33). On the subject of conflict and war, classical
realists acknowledge that these can partly be explained by way of situation. However, the underlying theoretical assumption is that wars are inevitable because human nature in itself presumes a constant desire or need to attain pride, lust and grandeur (Donnelly, 2013, p. 33).

In general, realism is argued to have two distinct faces. On the one hand, it is a broad position into the study of power. Power for realists is usually defined in a traditional sense such as military power or ‘hard power’. Realism is also, as argued by Jack Donnelly (2013), a collection of theories, models and premises out of the argument that the international system finds itself in a state of anarchy. Anarchy in international relations characterizes the international system as being absent of a world police or an international governing authority that is able to keep the states in line and dispense justice. The sovereign states find themselves, according to realism, in constant competition with each other in the pursuit of their own national interests, which are individually pursued in a rational sense. Thus the concept of balance of power, the distribution of power in the international system among the states and its implications, is central for realists in their research (Donnelly, 2013, p. 33).

2.2 Structural realism

Structural realism or neo-realism focuses on political structures as opposed to the classical emphasis on human nature. Struggle for power is central to structural realists in their research as the absence of international governance in international relations brings forth a state where competition is constant (Donnelly, 2013, p. 37). Kenneth Waltz argues that political structures are defined by three major characteristics: their ordering principles, which is how various actors are affiliated to each other, differentiation of functions, which describes how political activity is appropriated and lastly, distributions of capabilities, which details the distribution of power in a given political structure (Donnelly, 2013, p. 37).

In terms of ordering principles, Waltz argues for hierarchy and anarchy as the two basic existing principles. Hierarchy is associated with internal politics whereas anarchy, given the realist assumption of the international system, is associated with international politics. Structural realism presumes that in the international system, states are forced to operate within an environment that is not bound by settled rules (Donnelly, 2013, p. 37). Within the international system, every actor is required look to its own interests under the presumption that no one else is doing so. As opposed to internal politics of a state where various actors are
executing various types of political activity, international politics is viewed as a structure of states aiming to duplicate each other’s activities. Therefore, structural realists place a focus on the difference of capabilities in international politics (Donnelly, 2013, p. 37).

The theory’s central conclusion suggests that in a state of anarchy, states are prone to resort to balancing. In international politics, this is characterized by efforts undertaken by a state in order to reduce it’s own risk in the international system. Structural realism identifies two types of balancing. Internal balancing describes actions taken at the national level such as the appropriation of resources to the state’s national security from other sectors. External balancing as opposed to internal balancing describes actions taken by a state in the foreign policy domain, usually by establishing alliances and entering into formal and informal agreements (Donnelly, 2013, p. 38).

Structural realists argue the importance of the relativity of capabilities when it comes to balancing rather than the importance of absolute material resources. As balancing occurs out of the assumption of the anarchic state in the international system, a state has to concern itself with whether the gains of the others, with which it is balancing, outweighs it’s own. Cooperation among states engaged in balancing therefore tends to present difficulties to cooperate according to structural realist thought, as balancing focuses on relative gains (Donnelly, 2013, p. 40). According to this reasoning, states that are engaged in a cooperative balancing effort has to view each other as potential adversaries given anarchy. This form of predatory cooperation may give way to problems unless the nature of the cooperative effort sustains relative capabilities among the involved parties. As such, states may find themselves content with problems leaving them worse off on the condition that their rivals are suffering at an even greater cost (Donnelly, 2013, p. 40).

2.3 Neoclassical realism

Neoclassical realism (NCR) stands as the most recent form of realism. Rather than ignoring the classical and structural realist ideas, NCR combines these and could therefore is seen as a supplement (Donnelly, 2013) or a combined elaboration of classical and structural realism. The aim of NCR is to study forms of state conduct that interact with structural forces. It questions the fruitfulness of structural realism to produce satisfactory indicators for understanding this. Therefore, NCR argues that states may act in diverse ways to comparable
problems, pointing to the idea that responses may be motivated by domestic factors rather than systemic (Donnelly, 2013, p. 45) or structural ones (Foulon, 2015, p. 636).

In his work *Neoclassical Realism as an Extension of Neorealism*, Michiel Foulon argues that NCR departs from the congruent view held by structural realists on the idea of structures, but that in some cases, states are not destined to abide by these. Structural realists do agree that structural incentives can only partly explain this phenomenon. Waltz has argued that structures do place conditions on the behavior and result of state conduct rather than being a determinant of conduct and outcome (Foulon, 2015, p. 637).

As such, NCR holds that while systems shape state behavior, they do not determine actions undertaken. The theory agrees with structural realism’s basic assumptions about the anarchic state of the international system, the emphasis on relative power and its ideas about the state, for instance the constant need for self-preservation and attainment of security. What distinguishes NCR from classical and structural realism is that it questions the adequacy of the above-mentioned assumptions held by structural realists in terms of seeking satisfactory answers to state conduct (Foulon, 2015, p. 637).

In order to explain this, NCR expands its analysis to include variables from the *individual*, *state* and *system-levels*. Foreign policy may be shaped by factors ranging from all of the three mentioned. What is studied on the individual level may be the significance of a national leader or how the leader is formulating ideas about other states (Donnelly, 2013, p. 45), (Foulon, 2015, p. 637). On the state-level, emphasis may be placed on national *history*, *ideology* or *form of government*. On the system-level, *balancing*, the pursuit of relative gains (Donnelly, 2013, p. 45) that is forms of *cooperation* is of consideration.

As discussed above, neoclassical realism does not divert away from concerning itself with the first and second images of realism. By stressing the importance of factors at the state level it views these as *secondary variables* in the effort to understand foreign policy within a certain structure. NCR puts forward these *secondary variables* between structure and foreign policy action in a attempt to bridge these divides in order to explain state conduct which, analyzed from a structural realist standpoint, otherwise risk falling short of a satisfactory understanding when states act inconsistently with the incentives of a given structure (Foulon, 2015, p. 637).
Whereas structural realism, in a rather abstract way, tackles broad issues in international relations such as balancing it is the intent of NCR to identify and account for state conduct in a much lesser abstract level of foreign policy and grand strategy. Foulon argues therefore that it is the ability of NCR to offer precision in terms of explanation through its multi-leveled framework that makes the theory suitable in addressing empirical foreign policy questions (Foulon, 2015, p. 637).

2.4 Constructivism

Constructivism as a theory of international relations sets out to explain international affairs based on a different ontological standpoint than those of rationalist theories. The ontology of constructivism is signified by its embrace of the notions on the nature of actors held by first-wave critical theorists. In concrete terms, this means that when seeking explanations in international affairs, instead of viewing actors as being egoists and self-serving and the environment in which they operate as a strategic domain, constructivists view actors as culturally empowered, socially embedded and communicatively created (Reus-Smit, 2013, p. 222-223).

Four primary factors account for the prominence of constructivism as a theory in political science. First was a chance, sprung out of the debate between rationalist and critical theorists, to develop the theory as a way of proving the importance of non-rationalist theories. Secondly was that in the aftermath of the Cold War, new ideas developed that argued that the then two main theoretical camps, realism and liberalism, had been inadequate in their understanding of the systemic changes of world order (Reus-Smit, 2013, p. 223). The third and fourth factors were constituted by a variety of academic individuals, who in general accepted the basis argued for in critical theory but sought to find new ways of developing and imposing these onto questions that had been previously been of concern for liberalists and realists (Reus-Smit, 2013, p. 223).

Although there is a divide within constructivism itself between what has been named modernists and post-modernists, a common denominator has been the focus on three ontological premises pertaining to social life. Constructivists argue that these have got greater
potential in highlighting the nature of world politics than of the premises found in rationalist theories (Reus-Smit, 2013, p. 224).

First, constructivists agree that there are structures in the international system and even material ones, as rationalists argue. Constructivists differs as they identify not only material structures as important, but argues that equally important are normative and ideational structures in shaping the behavior of actors (Reus-Smit, 2013, p. 224). This removes the complete adherence to material structures that most often is the case for structural realists. Constructivists move beyond or before material structures in their effort to understand social and political action by arguing for the importance of ideas, values, beliefs and that these too possess structural characteristics that are essential to understand international politics.

Concerning the action of actors, constructivists argue that material structures only have a meaning in terms of being part of a structure of common knowledge. What are of importance are notions of identity, ideology, and existing forms of either enmity or friendship. These notions among various actors may then affect in which manner behavior and relationship among states are formed (Reus-Smit, 2013, p. 224). As such, normative and ideational structures play a central role in constructivist theorizing because they are believed to account for the social identities of political actors.

Secondly, non-material structures e.g. identity and value-based structures are of great importance when it comes to efforts in understanding actions of various actors. The reason for this is the idea that these non-material structures shape the identity of actors and thus their interests that inform conduct. Constructivists therefore focus on understanding the factors that play a role in interest-formation in their effort to account for problems in international politics. The argument of Alexander Wendt in stating that identities are to be seen as the basis of interest (Reus-Smit, 2013, p. 225) summarizes the importance of what has been said so far about the importance of social identities of states and individuals in constructivist thought.

A third common denominator of constructivists in terms of ontological premises is the idea that agents and structures are mutually constituted. In other words that it is the result of the practice and knowledge of actors or agents in producing, practicing and reproducing norms, practice and ideas. Such practices by agents then give rise to normative and ideational structures that in turn inform the identity, purpose and thus political and cultural behavior.
Exemplifying this is the view that international norms such as liberal democracy derives it’s legitimacy from the constant practices and held views by liberal democratic states and other actors in the international system.

*Imagination, communication* and *constraints* are three processes in constructivist thought that are seen as shaping interest-formation and identities. *Imagination* is of essence as it informs actors’ views on what they regard as possible in terms of action and thus affects the way conceive and pursue certain strategies. *Communication* pertains to how certain actions and strategies embarked upon are being explained and justified. Often this is form of appeal often takes place in terms of references to established norms such as *human rights* and *sovereignty*. Here, arguments about the relevance of such norms are often present in international politics because they may at times clash with each other (Reus-Smit, 2013, p. 226) & (Wendt, 1992, p. 413.)

Furthermore, constructivists argue that normative and ideational structures may pose limitations to the actions of actors regardless whether or not these structures form the actions of actors through imagination or communication. To the degree this holds depends on the actor and the context. Highlighted here is the idea that constraint depends on the given social context to which institutional norms and ideas lend moral strength. Arguing for certain actions using norms and ideas therefore only holds in cases where the performed or intended actions prove compatible with the fundamentals of existing norms and ideas (Reus-Smit, 2013, p. 226).

### 2.5 Three forms of constructivism

Within the field of *constructivism* are three main traditions where the differences lay in the type of focus that is considered. The first of these is the so-called *systemic-level constructivism* of which Alexander Wendt constitutes one of the major practitioners. This form of constructivism is oriented in a similar way as structural realism in its dealing with the systemic level of international politics (Reus-Smit, 2013, p. 227). Wendt suggests that actions and interests indeed are results of the identity of the state. What signifies this type of constructivist perspective is the practice in which adherence is given to what Wendt calls the *social identities* of the state. Studying the *social identity* of the state means seeking to
understand the social position of a state, which in turn has been created by the international society (Reus-Smit, 2013, p. 227).

If we return to what has been brought up earlier in this part on constructivism, the idea that some constructivists hold that in order to understand how interests-formation in international politics is created, it is necessary to study the how identities are being shaped at the national level. This tends to be overlooked within the field of systemic-level constructivism. However, the study of how identities are being shaped at the national level belongs to a second tradition of constructivism in what is called unit-level constructivism. The aim here is to understand the links between legal, domestic norms as well as the identities and interests that states possesses. As such, this version of theory concerns itself with the domestic level rather than the international domain (Reus-Smit, 2013, p. 227).

The third and last tradition of constructivism attempts to connect the two previously mentioned traditions in analyzing international politics. Holistic constructivism looks at the two aspects of constructivism, the international and domestic or social and corporate levels, as belonging together. Each constitutes different aspects of the political and social structure. Particular focus of the holistic approach intends to understand the rise and fall of states and international change (Reus-Smit, 2013, p. 228).

2.6 Definition of theoretical concepts

Returning to what is being discussed within the theoretical framework-part, the different focuses of constructivism and the three realisms in terms of ideas on what is analytically important can be separated in two central concepts. Those are security and identity. Security as a concept has traditionally been regarded and treated within the realm of realist thought and identity appears throughout constructivist writings.

Identity is here defined as the existence of held worldviews, ideas, values and interests present within a society that constitutes the notion of what an actor is. The concept has a strong focus on aspects pertaining to the social aspects on politics (Tusicisny, 2007, p. 430). Within the concept of identity, according to this definition, includes notions of interests, values and ideas. Held perceptions such notions are also of critical importance in terms of making sense of an actor’s identity as they are expected to factor in into how an identity is
built around and actor. Values addresses moral, legal or cultural perceptions and ideas also give us an understanding in how certain matters or other actors are perceived (i.e. friendship or enmity).

The concept of security operates on the social, political and economic levels. A definition of security in this study has been selected where it includes the levels of state, the international system but also concerns populations and is characterized as a perceived state of being in which increased attention by the government is being formed (Sheenan, 2005, p. 45). Within this definition, aspects of cooperation, national history and ideas that contribute to the perceived state of being are present.

3. Methodology

This part presents the general methodological approach, followed by the presentation of qualitative content analysis as selected method of research. Later sections of this chapter include operationalization of the theoretical concepts, limitations of the research, and a discussion on the selected material.

It has to be stated that I have a personal relation to the region as I have lived in Cyprus between August 2017 and May 2018. My experiences gathered from my time as an intern at the embassy of Sweden in Nicosia, discussions with state and non-state actors on the politics of Cyprus and the region, as well as my writings about the region for almost ten months have led to a certain degree of personal proximity to the field. In this context, the question relating to potential fallacies of conducting and evaluating qualitative research has to be acknowledged. As a researcher with some degree of practical insight and personal interest on the topic, the question of objectivity had to be regarded constantly throughout the research. In order to maintain good faith and to avoid injection of subjective notions into the research (Bryman, 2012, p. 392), a conscious decision was made to maintain a close connection between theory, methodology and analysis. Maintaining this connection gave me, as a researcher, clear reference parameters that assisted me to, in greatest possible extent, steer clear of subjectivity. Additionally, it benefited the research as it allowed for a common thread and a clear structure of the thesis.
The analysis maintains a clear connection to the selected theories. In the analysis of the material, the theories serve as separate lenses in terms of focus on different levels of abstraction and aspects. This has allowed me, in performing the qualitative content analysis, to take into account aspects of power and national interest, two concepts central in the classical realist tradition that are present on the state and inter-state levels. Structural realism offered the opportunity to take into account aspects of cooperation in terms of alignments, alliances or agreements. NCR and constructivism gave the analysis further depth in terms of ability to direct the analytical searchlight to domestic and social aspects as factors in explaining interest-formation and state-action. NCR’s contribution in the analysis, laid in its focus on detecting perceptions of national history, perceived ideas on other states or leaders and forms of cooperation, in particular how these are argued for to inform the interest of the states. Lastly, constructivism’s primary analytical contribution was its focus on the social aspects in the domestic areas of the states. It allowed the analysis to focus on stated perception on identity, ideology and culture, but also how leaders perceives other states in terms of enmity or friendship.

In order to maintain a clear structure throughout the research, the analytical chapter has been divided into three sections corresponding to three abstraction levels. The three abstraction levels have been devised from what kind of particular focus is held by constructivism, classical, structural and neoclassical realism. The first section deals with classical realist aspects e.g. national interest, objectives and power. The second section deals with aspects belonging to structural realism being cooperation, forms of alignments and balancing. The third and last section is composed of aspects from both neoclassical realism and constructivism as the two both focus on the domestic level as well as on aspects of history, identity and culture. As such, each part will present the analytical findings of each state relative to the three levels of abstraction. In organizing the analytical chapter in this manner, an important aspect of the states themselves has to be raised. That is the fact that each of the four states are bound to differentiate in their degree of regional focus and in terms of how the respective interest are formed and pursued. These differences will naturally present themselves given the selected structure of the analytical chapter.
3.1 Qualitative content analysis

Employing qualitative content analysis as a method allows the ability to ask a number of questions sprung out of the operationalization of the selected theoretical concepts. These questions are then to be imposed on the selected material in order to analyze the research problem.

The nature of qualitative content analysis gives rise to one aspect that ought to be considered, that is that the study can be replicated using the same set of questions and theoretical framework (Bryman, 2012, p. 302), (Bergström & Boréus, 2012, p. 50). It should be noted that attention ought to be given concerning the quality and authenticity of the material that is to be analyzed, particularly in studies where content analysis is employed (Bryman, 2012, p. 205). This will be elaborated further on in the part discussing selected material.

Qualitative content analysis has been selected for this study because it allows me to reach a certain degree of depth in the analysis of the selected material, which is necessary to understand the content of the texts. The focus is therefore not on counting and measuring the frequencies of certain ideas, arguments and actions but on interpreting these in terms of how they appear and in which way they are expressed (Bergström & Boréus, 2012, p. 50). Closely related to this is how the texts are directed, whether that be in a commanding, appealing or justifying manner (Bergström & Boréus, 2012, p. 51).

3.2 Operationalization

The selected theories and their concepts inform the questions that are to be imposed onto the material are drawn from the theoretical concepts as argued by the selected theories. Naturally, the selection of operational indicators is easy to be subjected to critique. For this reason, I dissect the theoretical concepts in chapter two carefully, which gives me a set of concrete indicators. These indicators allow me to practically carry out the analysis and at the same time keep the analytical framework as closely connected to the original theories as possible. This is done in order to give strength to the research and improve the general quality of the analysis (Essaiasson, et. al, 2012, p. 55).
The theoretical definition of identity, as elaborated on in the last part of chapter two, held that it is constituted by the existence of ideas, values and worldviews as well as present interests within the society. As the aim is to investigate the nature of identity, the operational indicators aiming to identify factors that constitute identity are moral and legal arguments, perceptions on culture as well as ideas about other actors (Bergström & Boréus, 2012, p. 53).

A definition of security in this study was selected where it included levels of state, the international system and populations where it is characterized as a perceived state of being (Sheenan, 2005, p. 45). The idea is to investigate this through the study of the selected material on how national interest, issues, challenges, actions, perception of power and aspects of cooperation are being framed and articulated. It will also factor in national history when it comes to framing these aspects.

3.3 Analytical approach

The analytical approach is based upon the operationalization of the theoretical concepts and allows me to study the nature of certain aspects present in the statements selected for analysis (Bergström & Boréus, 2012, p. 74). Primarily, it addresses the nature of the texts themselves, to whom they are addressed and in which manner they are formulated. It also takes the context in which the statements are addressed into account. Further, the analysis focuses on how challenges, issues and interests are perceived and formulated, but also how measures are conceived in addressing challenges. Focus also lies in examining how actions are described and articulated in addressing domestic, regional challenges and articulated goals. It also considers references to history in terms of justifying political action or cooperation. Moreover, the manners in which perceptions on other states and leaders are articulated are of importance as is the expression on culture and in terms of arguments for political action and cooperation. Finally, the manners in which the texts are making references to values in terms of political action are noted, as well as justification of political actions based upon moral or legal arguments.

3.4 Limitations of study

The research focuses on how interests are formed and pursued by Egypt, Israel, Cyprus and Turkey in the Eastern Mediterranean. What is of interest in all levels of analysis is how interests are formed today. Although this work includes a section on the history that conceptualizes the present interests of the states, the analysis does not concern itself with an
explicit historical analysis. The limitations imposed on this study are an effort to control the scope of the research. Given the focus on the states and state-related aspects, as prescribed by the theories, the research leaves the private sector aside. The aim is to explain how state-interests are formed, and the inclusion of the private sector would have required additional theories and therefore a significantly larger scope of research.

Finally, the decision to exclude Greece was taken on the grounds that the scope of the analysis would have been significantly larger, possibly at the expense of analytical depth. However, Greece’s nature as an Eastern Mediterranean state, its close relationship with Cyprus and participation in the regional trilateral formats testifies to its importance of the region. Nevertheless, considering the aims of this study, its exclusion does not impede on the possibility to reach satisfying answers.

3.5 Material

The material to be analyzed is made up of primary resources, including speeches, and written statements that have been strategically selected from the years 2016 to 2018. Secondary resources used in the research consist of research by Peace Research Institute Oslo Cyprus Centre (PRIO CC), European Rim Policy and Investment Council and academic literature (Essaiasson, et. al, 2012, p. 283).

The material is collected from the respective governments own official websites where it can be found in English. A portion of these statements were made in the native language of the respective countries, which creates a possibility that the analysis could fail in capturing terms or phrases of a particular value or meaning existent in these languages. As I lack knowledge of Greek, Turkish, Hebrew or Arabic, I am forced to limit myself to material available in English. A positive aspect is that the respective authorities themselves have conducted the translation from their native language, which bolsters the accuracy of the material.

One aspect worth discussing is the question of neutrality in the primary resources. When conducting research, primary resources are generally regarded as more independent than secondary resources. In this research, the analytical content is centered on official statements and speeches by national governments. This raises a need for awareness of possible
idealizations of relationship and exaggerations of challenges and threats (Bergström & Boréus, 2012, p. 51)

4. Background

This chapter presents a historical background of Egypt, Israel, Cyprus, Turkey and Iran. The aim with this chapter is to offer a broader understanding of the states’ political, economic and social development and their historical relations with each other. I have made the choice to bring Iran into this chapter, although it is neither part of the Eastern Mediterranean nor part of the analysis. The chief reason is that given Iran’s regional influence and its role as a significant power in the Middle East, its inclusion in the background chapter intends to present a view on how the Iranian presence in the Middle East can be conceptualizes in terms of the general orientation of Israeli politics.

4.1 Egypt: Transformation under Nasser, Sadat and regional relations

Egypt is home to one of the world’s oldest civilizations that emerged around 3000 BCE. (Land Guiden, 2018), (Islami, 2016, p. 190). It was relinquished from British rule in 1922, eight years after Britain had claimed it as a protectorate (Islami, 2016, p. 194). What followed its the newly gained independence was the Kingdom of Egypt and its relations with Britain came to be regulated in the 1936 Anglo-Egyptian Treaty. It provided for a twenty-year alliance between Britain and Egypt, a continued British hold of the naval base in Alexandria and the right to maintain a force of 10,000 men in the Suez Canal Zone. These two issues came to form two political problems in Egypt’s domestic society.

As a consequence of the withdrawal of British forces from Egypt, except the two particularities mentioned above, a necessity existed to form a new Egyptian army. Mustafa Nahas, then Prime Minister of Egypt and a signatory of the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty, established a new military academy. Among its graduates was Gamal Abdul Nasser, who came to associate himself with a group of officers that sought the reformation of Egypt and the expulsion of Britain. As of 1939, the group, known today as the Free Officers Movement, had contacts with the Muslim Brotherhood, an organization founded in 1928 with an objective to combat foreign influence in Egypt and emerging secularizing efforts in the Middle East. In its early days, the Muslim Brotherhood’s modus operandi was secretive and its actions often
militant, carrying out attacks against British forces in the Canal Zone (Kissinger, 2016, p. 118).

The brotherhood’s leader, Hassan Al-Banna came to be of significance in Egypt and the Muslim Brotherhood grew into a countrywide network (Kissinger, 2016, p. 118). In 1947, he addressed the Egyptian King Farouk in a letter named “Toward the light” issuing critique of Egypt’s institutions and putting forward the idea of replacing the national state with an Islamic alternative (Kissinger, 2016, p. 118).

Nasser would ten years later become one of the leading figures in the Egyptian revolution of 1952 (Quigley, 1966, p. 1071) and serve as both President and Prime Minister (Quigley, 1966, p. 1073) where he moved to outlaw the Muslim Brotherhood and sought over the years to establish himself as the leader of the Arab nationalist movement (Quigley, 1966, p. 1075).

Anwar Sadat who had served as Vice President under Nasser took over the presidency in 1970. One of the main changes in Egyptian-Israeli relations was the Egyptian-Israeli Peace Treaty of 1978, which was a reorientation of Egyptian policy to finally recognized Israel’s right to exist (Avineri, 2017).

The significance of the treaty is that it established peace after thirty years of conflict and three wars (Avineri, 2017) and a new era of bilateral relations between the two states. It was also seen as a first step towards comprehensive peace in the Middle East. Since then, collaboration has taken form in numerous fields. In 1994, Israeli company Merhav invested into the Middle East Oil Refinery (MIDOR) in Alexandria (American Chamber of Commerce in Egypt, 2001). A second common project was the Arish-Ashkelon underwater gas-pipeline that supplied Israel with Egyptian gas. The Arish-Ashkelon pipeline branches of the larger Arab gas pipeline that runs on land from Egypt to Jordan, Syria and Turkey and is operated by East Mediterranean Gas Company (EMG), the owners of which are both Israeli and Egyptian companies (Oil and Gas Journal, 2007), (Ghafar, 2016, p. 53).

The Begin-Sadat Agreement has remained intact despite shifts in governments of both states, including under the Egyptian uprising and the short-lived government of Mohammed Morsi, who was closely affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood. This indicates the
significance of the treaty from both sides, not least in terms of existing mutual economic and security interests (Avineri, 2017).

During the tenure of Mohammed Morsi the uncertainty about Egypt’s future relationship with its neighbors also concerned Cyprus. The Morsi government developed a close relationship with Turkey and decided not to take any formal standpoint on the disputes between the Republic of Cyprus, TRNC and Turkey regarding maritime zones (Grioriadis, 2014, p. 130).

In fact, a bill was submitted in the Egyptian parliament by pro-government parliamentarians suggesting the annulment of Egypt’s own EEZ agreement with Cyprus (Grioriadis, 2014, p. 130), which had been signed in 2003 by the Mubarak government (AL-Monitor, 2018). After the military takeover in 2013, the new government began to distance itself from Turkey and the new president Abdel Fattah El-Sisi moved to outlaw the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. The military takeover was openly criticized by the then Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan Egypt who accused Sisi of being a tyrant, and Turkey allowed pro-Muslim Brotherhood and anti-Sisi media networks to broadcast from Turkey (Washington Institute, 2015).

**4.2 Iran: Political transitions, past and present regional influence**

Persia has historically been affected by every significant conquest on the Eurasian landmass, and yet managed to retain a sense of identity. Despite the conquests of Alexander the Great, Islamic armies and the Mongols, which laid waste to the historical consciousness and political autonomy of other people, the Persians managed to hold on to a sense of cultural superiority and maintained their historical connection with their ancient rulers, whilst temporarily conceding to foreigners (Kissinger, 2014, p. 151). Persia later adopted the Shia-version Islam from its Arab conquerors, partly in order to distinguish itself from the Sunni Ottoman Empire. It maintained Persian as its primary language and thus merged the new religion with its own cultural legacy (Kissinger, 2014, p. 151-2).

The historical experience from managing the challenges that has been posed upon Persia led to an elaborated form of diplomacy characterized by endurance, psychological manipulation of its enemies along with a well-calculated analysis of geopolitics. Through its geopolitical outlook, religion and culture, Persia, or Iran since 1935, has managed to preserve the uniqueness of its heritage and as well as the aspects of its traditional role in the region (Kissinger, 2014, p. 152).
Iran underwent dramatic domestic changes in the 20th century. Between 1921 and 1925, political power in Iran gradually came under the control of Shah Reza Pahlavi, a former officer in the Russian Cossack Brigade, as he deposed the old Shah Ahmad. His political aims were to disband tribalism and establish national loyalty to the state. During these years, Iran began a period of modernization in a very similar way to what had been done by Kemal Ataturk in Turkey. It would, however, prove to be difficult due to low social development, shortage of financial resources and an underdeveloped economy. Its primary resource, oil, was managed by the Anglo-Persian Oil Company (later AIOC or Anglo-Iranian Oil Company), and would contribute to a domestic divide where religious and anti-foreign sentiments would advocate nationalization of the country’s petroleum industry (Quigley, 1966, p. 1055).

In 1951, Iran had begun a process of nationalization. This resulted in AIOC pleading its case to the International Court of Justice (ICJ), which it eventually lost and Iran moved on with nationalization under Prime Minister Mohammed Mossadegh. The British hit Iran with sanctions and Mossadegh broke of diplomatic relations between the two countries. He would later be deposed through efforts led by a combination of the older Iranian elite being the major landowners, the army and the Shah, as well as by British and American support (Quigley, 1966, p. 1059).

Under the Shah, the Iranian society began to stir as people eventually sought democratic change and economic distribution. The revolution of 1979 occurred largely due to the failure of attempted modernization schemes under the Shah and the brutal tactics employed by the authorities in their attempts to control nonconformists within the society. The revolution came to center on Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini who took the role of Supreme Leader of the revolution. The new doctrine regarded the state as a convenient tool that could be utilized in the pursuit of its religious goals (Kissinger, 2014, p. 152). It regarded the existing institutions in the Middle East as illegitimate because they were not based on divine law, upon which it argued international politics ought to be based (Kissinger, 2014, p. 153). Despite this view, Iran held membership in the United Nations (UN), operated a diplomatic service and traded with the world (Kissinger, 2014, p. 154).

Today, instabilities in Syria and Iraq have led to increased Iranian influence across a great portion of the Middle East. Its support for non-state actors has provided Iran with a strategic
base that extends further than the ideology of the religious leaders (CSIS, 2015). One example is its support of Hezbollah, which functions as a superior organization to the Shia militias in Syria (Washington Institute, 2018). An example of this could be seen in 2011, when the leader of The Iranian Revolutionary Guard’s Quds Force, Qasem Soleimani, commanded Hezbollah-forces in Syria (Washington Institute, 2018). One example pointing to Hezbollah’s close relationship with other Shia militias can be found in the southern suburbs of Beirut, an area that is largely controlled by Hezbollah. Here offices of the main Shia militias exist as well as television and radio networks broadcasting to the various Shia communities the region. Historically, Hezbollah in Lebanon has previously been called a state within a state but this is gradually changing as the organization has been increasing its presence within the Lebanese state institutions (Washington Institute, 2018).

In this context, Iran has gained access to the shores of the Eastern Mediterranean through Syria, Lebanon and Iraq. Many refer to this corridor as the Shia-Crescent, while some Shia-Muslims refer to this as Wilayat Imam Ali, namely the state of Imam Ali (Shia-Islam’s first Imam). The corridor is intended to serve as a supply route of Iranian weapons to the Eastern Mediterranean coast as well as to contribute to strengthen Shia identity in the region (Washington Institute, 2018).

4.3 Israel: Establishment, neighborly relations and a west-ward orientation

The modern history of today’s Israel can be traced back to the Balfour Declaration, a letter sent in 1917 by British Foreign Secretary Arthur James Balfour to Lord Walter Rothschild, at the time one of the most prominent individuals within the British Zionist Movement. The Zionist movement aspired to establish in Palestine, a territory that would give Jews and other individuals subjected to anti-Semitic persecution, a ‘national home’. Moreover, the letter suggested that along these lines nothing should be undertaken that would discriminate against the religious or civil rights of the existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine (Quigley, 1966, p. 247). In 1920, a conference between the Great Powers (France, Britain, Italy and Japan) was held in San Remo where four mandates were set up in the Middle East, among these the British mandate of Palestine (Quigley, 1966, p. 248).

Over the decades the Jewish settlements in Palestine, then largely concentrated on agriculture, received substantial assistance from the World Zionist Congress and the Jewish
Agency for Palestine in terms of political and administrative experience, which subsequently created the conditions for political structure in the Israeli state (Quigley, 1966, p. 1064). The State of Israel was proclaimed on the 14th of May in 1948 by David Ben Gurion and realized long-held aspiration to establish a state in the region for the Jewish people. Within a month, conflict erupted between the new state and its Arab neighbors and was followed by a truce brokered by the UN. Eruption of new hostilities erupted and new efforts by the UN led subsequently to the assassination of the UN-mediator, diplomat and member of the Swedish royal family, Folke Bernadotte on the 17th of September in 1948 (Quigley, 1966, p. 1065). Three days after the assassination of Bernadotte, the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, then the chief Muslim leader in the Levant, issued the proclamation of an “Arab Government of All Palestine”. This authority was established in Gaza on Egyptian-controlled territory and received recognition by a majority of the Arab states, with the exception of Jordan (Quigley, 1966, p. 1067). This marked the start of the several conflicts that would continue to pose problems for both Israel, its neighbors and for peace in the region.

As noted above, Israel’s relationship with its immediate neighbors has traditionally been characterized by a rejection, on the part of the Arab states, of Israel’s existence (Agdemir, 2016, p. 103). Today, inter-state conflict is absent but a prolonged conflict continues to exist between Israel and the Palestinians.

Israel’s relationship with Turkey, one that had been prosperous in the last decades, was squandered in the wake of the Mavi Mamara flotilla-incident in which nine Turkish citizens lost their lives. Prior to that, Turkish-Israeli relations have served Israel positively in terms of trade but also as a form of counter-balance to Iran. It has also been a way in which Israel could lessen the religious dimension of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and relieve itself from regional isolation (Agdemir, 2016, p. 106). As such, if political conditions are favorable between the two countries, it is likely that Israel would favor increased security and economic ties with Turkey before other regional actors. A plan to bring Israeli gas to Turkey exists, but given the state of Turkish-Israeli relations, a notion of suspicion exist between the two countries (Rettig, 2016, p. 66). Israeli settlement policy, not least its conduct towards Palestinians during Operation Protective Edge in 2014 (Grioriadis, 2014, p. 130), Turkey’s military operations in Afrin, the recognition of the USA of Palestine as the capital of Israel (Al-Monitor, 2018) and the gradual increase of Islamic politics in Turkey play into the poor state of relations between Israel and Turkey (Al-Monitor, 2018).
In recent years, Israel has begun to orient itself westwards to the Eastern Mediterranean and has developed relations with its neighbors to the west. In some aspects it has also begun to look towards some of the Sunni states in the region. This has come against the backdrop the Arab Spring and Iran’s growing influence in Syria, Iraq and Lebanon (Agdemir, 2016, p. 105), (Susser, 2017).

Its relationship with Cyprus has gradually evolved over the last two decades. Under the 1970’s and 80’s Nicosia was uneasy towards the then close relationship that existed between Israel and Turkey, not least in terms of military ties. Cyprus opened its embassy in Tel Aviv in 1994 and under that period the bilateral relations started to form in terms of economic and cultural agreements (Agdemir, 2016, p. 107). As of 2010, the countries have started to explore additional possibilities as a result of the recent natural gas discoveries. Agreements on delineation of their respective EEZ’s were concluded in 2010 (Agdemir, 2016, p. 106) which then provided the basis for extended ties economic ties in the Eastern Mediterranean. These ties have since then been expanded in the field of security and defense. Agreements have been concluded in which the Israeli navy and air force were given the permission to enter Cypriot airspace and territorial waters in order to protect natural gas resources (Agdemir, 2016, p. 111).

Israel has traditionally been a resource-poor state and for that reason, its gas discoveries are viewed positively not only in terms of economic prosperity, but also as a means of ensuring energy security (Rettig, 2016, p. 59). The discovery sparked a series of conflicts within domestic political and economic circles. In 2012 the Israeli Antitrust Authority noted that Nobel Energy and Delek Group, the partnership responsible for the discoveries, to constitute a monopoly. Concerns were raised that Israel would be receiving gas from a single supplier and therefore the partnership had to sell of its two smaller fields discovered in 2012 and 2013 (Rettig, 2016, p. 61-2). The matter became politicized and was eventually circumvented by the government on the basis of national security. Central arguments were that Israel had to expedite its natural gas exports to Europe through Cyprus and Greece in order to gain political benefits as the two would be able to influence the European Union (EU) on eventual anti-Israeli resolutions (Rettig, 2016, p. 63) Another argument was the need to export to Jordan and Egypt in order to undercut potential Iranian exports to these two.
countries (Rettig, 2016, p.65). As of today, the former has started to receive natural gas form Israel and an agreement on exports to Egypt was signed in 2018 (Middle East Eye, 2018).

4.4 Turkey: Establishment, political development and domestic challenges

The Treaty of Lausanne saw Turkish relinquishment of Arabia, Mesopotamia, the Levant, Western Thrace and a number of Islands in the Aegean and ended four hundred year of decline of the Ottoman Empire (Quigley, 1966, p. 276). Turkey was established as a state in 1923 by Mustafa Kemal, later Ataturk, who embarked on a grand project of modernization adopting political, social and legal reforms in order to transform Turkey (CIA, 2018) & (Quigley, 1966, p. 1055).

The Kemalists believed that for Turkey to become a rational secular state it had to put emphasis on science and modern education as means of establishing a modern industrial economy (Ahmad, 2003, p 53). In order to achieve this, political power had to be attained. As of 1923, the Kemalists had a minority in the Grand National Assembly and faced political opposition that sought to reinstate of the Sultanate. The People’s Party (CHP) came to be the center of political activity and the purpose of its establishment was to function as the leading force for change in the new state. After a period of political struggle, the Grand National Assembly voted in 1924 to abolish the Caliphate and dispelled the House of Osman from Turkey (Ahmad, 2003, p. 53-4).

Afterwards, Turkey experienced a one-party rule after which the political system gradually was transformed into a multi-party system, initially by design in order to mitigate political tensions (Ahmad, 2003, p. 59). In 1950, Turkey underwent a peaceful transfer of power with the electoral win of the Democratic Party and the following period saw an increase in the number of parties. Throughout the 20th century, Turkish domestic politics has been significantly divided and the country has gone through periods of instabilities along with military coups that continue to shape the Turkish society (CIA, 2018).

Today, Turkey face several challenges in terms of instability in its southeastern parts, where tensions exist between the authorities and various Kurdish groups, among them the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK). The peace process between the central government and PKK collapsed in 2015 (ISDP, 2016 p. 2) and since then the Turkish army has regularly conducted anti-terror operations in southeastern Turkey as well as in northern Syria, where the aims are
to combat terrorism (Reuters, 2018) and prevent the establishment of a Kurdish state on its borders. The aftermath of the attempted *coup de état* in 2016 has affected the Turkish society where thousands have been subjected to detention on accusatory charges of links to the Gülenists movement (designated FETÖ by Turkey) or the PKK (The Cairo Review, 2017).

Historically, a link is present between rises of emancipatory movements and constitutional change. During the 1969’s and 70’s Turkey saw an increase of leftist political aspirations and politicians to the right viewed the then existing constitution as too liberal. Leftist militancy and excessive trade union-rights, as the political right saw it, was partly remedied by the military coup in 1980 where Turkey’s present constitution was formed. This link can be seen in terms of response to the rise of the pro-Kurdish People’s Democratic Party (HDP), in which is constitutional changes have been engineered based upon the interest of the state, coupled with a rapprochement between the nationalists and the conservative political forces, that is between the Justice and Development Party (AKP) and the Nationalist Action Party (MHP) (ISDP, 2017).

Despite its challenges, Turkey is a major regional power. It has significant economic relations with the EU of which it remains a candidate country (EU Council, 2018), although the developments in recent years as mentioned above continue to attract criticism of the current state of Turkish democracy and freedom. Turkey is also an important transit-country of oil and natural gas that supplies large parts of southern Europe, and functions as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization’s (NATO) southern pillar (Brzezinski, 1997, p. 47).

### 4.5 Republic of Cyprus: Establishment, division and problems of peace

Prior to 1571, the island of Cyprus was inhabited almost entirely by a Greek-speaking Christian-Orthodox population, but this changed significantly as a result of the Ottoman conquest and a subsequent settlement of Turkish-speaking Sunni-Muslim peasants and craftsmen from Anatolia (Bachelli & Noel, 2015, p. 33). Afterwards, the demographic distribution were 80% Greek Cypriots and 20% Turkish Cypriots in the otherwise Muslim-dominated Ottoman Empire. At one point, 346 villages of mixed ethnicities existed and the degree of cultural exchange was high as the two communities cooperated with each other and celebrated each other’s religious festivities (Asmussen, 2015, p. 33-4).
The harmony between the two Cypriot communities lasted to a relatively high degree under British rule, which took over the administration from the Ottomans in 1878. The administrative system from the Ottoman era was initially left intact and it had a substantial control over the general matters pertaining to the religious communities. In this way, the education remained under the influence of Muslim respectively Christian traditions, in which nationalism from both Turkey and Greece could be exported into the literature (Asmussen, 2015, p. 34). The tensions that erupted in 1931 were chiefly centered on Greco-British clashes, as was the insurgency by the guerilla movement Ethniki Organosis Kyprion Agoniston or EOKA. Inter-ethnic conflict on the island erupted when Turkish-Cypriot security personnel was killed forcing Turkish and Greek Cypriot to become internally displaced following subsequent violence in 1958 (Asmussen, 2015, p. 34).

Two years later, in 1960, the Cyprus Republic was established but the trust between the two communities was poor. A portion of the Greek Cypriots sought Enosis, unity of the island with Greece. The Turkish Cypriots, disinclined to become a minority in a large Greek state, responded with taksim, being partition of the island that in reality only had support by the Turkish Cypriot leadership (Asmussen, 2015, p. 35). In 1963, the Greek Cypriot leadership sought control of the state institutions in which nation-wide violence followed. As a result, The Turkish Cypriots retreated into protected enclaves and the same year saw the first deployment of UN troops on the island (Bryant & Mason, 2015, p. 35).

In 1974, a coup de état by the Greek military junta was conducted against Greek-Cypriot president Makarios, prompted the Turkish military to land on the island invoking its right as a guarantor power. Such were the division of the island. Today, 36% of its territory is under control by the self-declared Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), which, as of 1983, has its own legislative and executive authorities (Bryant & Mason, 2017, p. 3).

Efforts to reunite the two sides have been largely unsuccessful despite numerous peace efforts since 1974. The two sides conducted two High-Level Agreements in 1977 and 1979 that a future solution should be found within the framework of a non-aligned bicommmunal federation where each community would administer their own territories (Asmussen, 2015, p. 36).
Reunification attempts have never been as close as they were in 2004 when an UN-sponsored settlement (the Annan Plan) was negotiated between the two sides. Subsequent referendums were held in both communities where two thirds of the Turkish Cypriots (64.90%) voted in favor of the Annan Plan, but was rejected by three quarters (75.83%) of the Greek Cypriots (Ker-Lindsay, 2015, p. 1.) & (Election Guide, 2018).

In 2017, a new round of talks was held in Swiss Crans-Montana. Core differences between the two Cypriot sides centered mainly on power-sharing, decision making in lower federal organs as well as whether the federal executive would be a rotating post. Differences were also apparent regarding the treatment of Turkish nationals residing in Cyprus and whether they would be given equal treatment as Greek nationals being EU citizens. Moreover, the issue of security guarantees for the Island and the unilateral right to intervention as stipulated in the Treaty of Guarantee has for long been a major issue, as has the presence of Greek and Turkish forces (UN, 2017. S/2017/814.) In the words of the UN Secretary General, “a historic opportunity was missed in Crans-Montana” (UN, 2017. S/2017/814) and the following period came to be one in which both sides blamed the other for the breakdown.

The Cyprus problem has several characteristics related to its insolvency. The absence of major violence on the island since 1974 and the relatively high degree of wellbeing has resulted in a situation where Cypriots have difficulties in conceiving the real impact of the conflict in their daily lives. A certain degree of comfort is present in the communities, which in turn impacts the possibilities for a reunification, as motivation to take substantial political risks to solve the problem remains low on both sides (Adamides, 2015, p. 7). The populations on both sides have also demonstrated disinclination to take risks that are coupled with a settlement and this have, of course, informed the politics. These risks are present on the political level and the nature of governance where the existing Greek Cypriot administration is associated with producing a sense security. Therefore, the current status quo is seen as a safer option (Adamides, 2015, p. 7).

On the social level, both sides express concern of a possible erosion of their respective identities. These risks also concern the level of economy where the Greek Cypriot side, which is far wealthier than the Turkish Cypriots, has concerns that they will loose out in terms of a decrease in economic prosperity (Adamides, 2015, p. 7). The Turkish Cypriots are concerned
that its economy might be overshadowed by the Greek Cypriot economy, absent geographical, political and economic separation (Adamides, 2015, p. 7-8).

The Cyprus problem is a long-drawn protracted conflict that, despite its non-violent nature, is central to the societies. Greek Cypriots, in particular, ignore the conflict to a large degree while at the same time maintains it as a part of their identity (Adamides, 2015, p. 8). These are conflict routines that become increasingly more difficult the more they are embedded within the society. Disruption of the conflict is expected to come at a price and diminishes the incentives of changing the status quo and yet there is a public expectation that the conflict has to be given attention by the media and the politicians, leading to an existing negative cycle where both contribute to and benefits from perpetuating the conflict (Adamides, 2015, p. 10).

5. Analysis

This chapter presents the analysis of the selected speeches and texts pertaining to Cyprus, Israel, Egypt and Turkey. The section is divided into three main sections according to the three different levels of abstraction, where the analysis of the respective texts for each country will be presented. The first section deals with classical realist aspects, that is national interest, objectives and power. The second section deals with aspects pertaining to structural realism such as cooperation, forms of alignments and balancing. The third section is composed of aspects from both neoclassical realism and constructivism as the two focuses on the domestic level and on aspects on history, identity and culture.

5.1 National interests and competition: The classic incentives

5.1.1 Egypt: Anti-Terrorism and Economic Development for a future Egypt

The Egyptian president Sisi articulated the interests and challenges as perceived by the Egyptian government in a statement in front of an audience composed of foreign dignitaries and Egyptian and Arab army graduates. The statement noted the historical significance of the army and expressed it as a longstanding national institution with great respect from the Egyptian people, and noted the people’s relationship with the army to constitute an eternal covenant, given the army’s continuous commitment to protect its people and safeguarding the nation (SIS, 2017, Graduation speech).
On the subject of current challenges, the statement goes back to history in recalling that Egypt has fought battles of liberation and national independence (SIS, 2017, Graduation speech) and connects it with the present, arguing that Egypt today faces two crucial battles: terrorism and attaining economic and social development. It also gives notice to the shift in the nature of wars and argues that today’s enemy is in disguise, relying on intimidation and spreading frustration (SIS, 2017, Graduation speech). Terrorism, as one of the identified challenges, is described as consisting of various dimensions and the government articulates a clear intention not to accept any other countries or entities to provide safe havens, funding or the promotion of ideologies (SIS, 2017, Graduation speech).

Moreover, the statement argues in an affirmative manner that Egypt will always be a nation that aspires for peace and that its safeguarding will rely on the power of the police, the Army, intellectuals and what the statement characterizes as “all its sons” (SIS, 2017, Graduation speech).

The second portrayed challenge, economic development, is presented in the context of transforming Egypt into a modern state. It states the government’s intention, in an appealing manner, to adopt a systematic economic reform. The statement describes furthermore that doors will be wide open for investment (Egyptian, Arabic or foreign) with a goal of providing work opportunities for the younger generation as well as an increase in public services, health and education and a lower poverty level (SIS, 2017, Graduation speech).

Elaborating on economic development as a major goal and challenge for Egypt, Tarek El Molla, the Egyptian Minister of Petroleum and Mineral Resources, spoke on the global role of gas markets and exports and articulated Egypt’s own role and aspirations. In the address, a view is presented in which Egypt regards energy as a key element in achieving sustainability. The statement also highlights the importance of energy in its contribution to development, employment, stability and increased living standards (Egyptian Ministry of Petroleum, Bolivia Gas Summit, 2017). In the statement, emphasis is put on articulating Egypt’s current economic state. It describes today’s Egypt in the sense that it is currently undergoing major transition to establish a modern and socially just state. It also refers to Egypt possessing both human and natural resources and argues that these put Egypt well off to achieving these goals (Egyptian Ministry of Petroleum, Bolivia Gas Summit, 2017).
The statement presents an Egyptian strategy for 2030, which include megaprojects as the establishment of a new capital and widening of the Suez Canal, as well as additional industrial areas are developed. As such, the energy sector in Egypt is given a particular importance in its intended aim to contribute to the economic development in terms of satisfying national demand and a strengthening of the overall national economy (Egyptian Ministry of Petroleum, Bolivia Gas Summit, 2017).

5.1.2 Israel: External threats and the elevation of Israel’s position

For Israel, security-challenges appear to equally encompass the state and its population as they are often portrayed as existential. In a statement from 2017, Prime Minister Netanyahu elaborated on Israel’s perceived challenges and efforts. The statement addressed primarily the diplomatic representatives in Israel and outlined the government’s conception of its relations with the Arab states, in which it displayed an interest to nurture inter-state cooperation, but that formal peace treaties were dependent upon a settlement of the Palestinian issue (Prime Minister’s Office, 2017, JP Diplomatic conference).

Two central objectives for the Israeli government were outlined, one that concerned the regional situation in which the articulated aim is to transform the current level of cooperation with the Arab states into a formal peace with the Palestinians and the Arab simultaneously. The second proposed challenge is argued to connect with the first, that is an incentive to seek a change in terms of countries voting conduct in international organizations. Moreover, the statement notes that these two challenges constitute a part in a overall aim to expand a network of various alliances (Prime Minister’s Office, 2017, JP Diplomatic conference) that is by seeking for partners regionally and internationally with the aim to increase Israel’s position in the region.

On identified security challenges, the statement in its entirety presents Iran as a serious threat for Israel and the world. Two aspects of Iran are here highlighted, each argued for to present different security implications for Israel. The statement prophesizes, in an alarming manner, the inevitability of a nuclear Iran and, in connection to that, highlights Iranian calls for Israel’s destruction (Prime Minister’s Office, 2017, JP Diplomatic conference). The second aspect concerns Iranian influence in the region and appears to be regarded with a greater level of seriousness in the statement, in terms of articulated response from the Israeli government. It openly describes Iran’s presence in the region in the context of an Iranian
attempt to create an empire in which it controls Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Yemen and Gaza. Here, Syria stands out and the statement assures, in explicit terms, that the Israeli government will resort to any actions deemed necessary in order to prevent what is characterized as Iranian establishment in the country (Prime Minister’s Office, 2017, JP Diplomatic conference).

Iranian presence in the region, particularly in Syria, but also in terms of its relations with non-state actors appears to be perceived as an active security threat to Israel. A perceived importance on the strengthening of Israel’s position and support vis-à-vis Iran is further demonstrated on increased pressure and the employment of measures to counter what the statement describes as Iranian aggression. It is perceived that it will result in a decrease of terrorism and as a contribution to regional stability and peace, arguing that both Hamas and Hezbollah, two actors within a very close proximity to Israel, would be weakened absent of Iranian support (Prime Minister’s Office, 2017, JP Diplomatic conference).

5.1.3 Turkey: National unity, independence and maritime issues

The Turkish government places a significant degree of importance on maintaining its sovereign status, which is perceived to be under threat. In a speech at the Munich Security Conference (MSC) by the Turkish Foreign Minister, Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu spoke on Turkey’s interests in maintaining its national unity and sovereignty. From the Turkish government’s perspective, a variety of factors like organized political violence and terrorist actions from militant groups constitute a serious security challenge for the maintenance of stability and the government’s goal of national unity. It argues a concept of unity at home, which it to a high degree interlinks with stability in its immediate surroundings, in particular in Syria and Iraq where the Turkish Armed forces is active in its efforts in combating the various Kurdish militias (Turkish MFA, 2017, MSC).

The primary argument, as seen from Çavuşoğlu statement at the MSC, is that Turkey clearly regards the eventuality of strengthened Kurdish groups in the northern regions of Syria and Iraq as a serious threat, both for the two respective countries, but primarily for Turkey itself (Turkish MFA, 2017, MSC). For Turkey, increased sectarianism in the border-region and a possible reinvigoration of the Kurdish population in Turkey runs counter to its national interests and is thus perceived as a serious threat to the country’s unity.
Foreign Minister Çavuşoğlu, articulated a guiding principle of Turkish politics being peace and prosperity at home and in the world, arguing that Turkish humanitarian efforts in terms of providing a place for refugees. The Turkish government argues its interest to create regional stability and security perceiving its efforts in combatting terrorist groups in Syria and the designated terror network Fetullah Terrorist Organization (FETÖ) to follow along the lines of this principle (Turkish MFA, 2017, Phileleftheros).

For the Turkish government, the notion of independence is central and is reflected in terms of its energy plans. Energy in Turkey is not only considered a mere economic matter, but functions as an important part in Turkey’s national security outlook. Its minister of foreign affairs Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu articulated, in an interview in 2017, the government’s interests and plans in the field of energy, in which it aims at increasing the share of domestic energy in its energy mix (Turkish MFA, 2018, Kathimerini). Arguing its economic relevance, the government views Turkey as the primary and safest route to Europe in terms of energy exports (Turkish MFA, 2017, Phileleftheros). Natural gas in the Eastern Mediterranean is therefore perceived to contribute to Turkish national security and the Turkish government argues that as a sovereign state, it has natural rights to explore and exploit natural gas in the Eastern Mediterranean. Within this context, Turkey is set to perform its own drillings in the Eastern Mediterranean as argued by Çavuşoğlu (Turkish MFA, 2018, Kathimerini).

As argued in the statement, Turkey legally contests parts of the Eastern Mediterranean, namely maritime areas south west of the island of Cyprus. The primary argument of the Turkish government is that parts of these areas fall within Turkey’s continental shelf, which then as a result ascribes sovereign rights to the state in those areas that belong to the continental shelf. On that basis, Turkey has objected to the existent Egyptian-Greek Cypriot delimitation agreement of their respective EEZ’s, insisting that it is running contrary to international law (Turkish MFA, 2018, Kathimerini).

Given the imperative in combating what is perceived as discriminatory actions in maritime areas off the Turkish mainland, the government is focused on protecting what it regards as Turkish interests. As articulated in a statement released following a meeting of the Turkish National Security Council (2017), the Turkish government claims its dispute with Greece in the Aegean Sea is informed by what it considers legitimate rights (Presidency of the Republic of Turkey, 2018, NSC Meeting). The importance for Turkish interests in the Aegean is
reflected by the government’s position in its willingness to resolve the matter, but emphasizes that it will never agree to any *fait accompli*, which suggests that it prefers to discuss the matter outside the existing parameters on maritime borders in the Aegean.

Turkish President Erdoğan made this reasoning clear in 2018, at a ceremony for natural gas distribution, when he articulated the significance of Turkish maritime interest in the Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean for Turkey’s security. In the statement, the Turkish president put Cyprus and Greece on notice, objecting to what it considers opportunistic efforts in the Aegean and the Eastern Mediterranean amidst a period in which the most urgent Turkish security challenges are present in other places (Presidency of the Republic of Turkey, 2018, *Turkey is a rising power*). This speaks to a view held by the Turkish government that it perceives the factors mentioned as security challenges for Turkey, each of varying degree of urgency, but nevertheless important for the maintenance of the Turkish state as a strong independent entity.

5.1.4 Republic of Cyprus: Exercise of sovereign rights in a new regional environment

The government of the Republic of Cyprus, as articulated by president Anastasiades in a speech addressed to the Cypriot Shipping Chamber, finds itself in a period during which the geopolitics of the region is undergoing a transition, pointing to emerging political and economic balances in the Eastern Mediterranean (PIO, 2018, *Address to the Cyprus Shipping Chamber*). Amidst these perceived changes, the government argues that Cyprus is asserting itself into its proper place within the center of these developments. Here, discoveries of natural gas resources are seen to present new opportunities for Cyprus’s economy (PIO, 2018, *Address to the Cyprus Shipping Chamber*).

This economic potential should be seen in the context of the government’s aim to develop the overall economy, in which natural gas constitutes an important aspect, which has been a defined goal since it got into office in 2013 during a period of significant economic hardship following the 2012-2013 Cypriot financial crisis. Natural gas, one aspect of the intended economic development is not only seen as a way of improving the economy as such, but allows for Cyprus to create economic partnerships in the Eastern Mediterranean (Presidency of the Republic, 2017, *Address at Oil and Gas Forum*).

There is a frequently displayed notion, concerning the government’s perception of Cyprus’s role in the region, that Cyprus is a bridge between Europe and its southern
neighborhood. The government attaches additional importance concerning Cyprus’s regional role by arguing that it has cultivated what is describes as mutual understanding and friendship with the states in the region (with the exception of Turkey) (Presidency of the Republic, 2017, Remarks at German Marshall Fund).

Given its geographical position, the Cypriot government sees itself as a front line state within the European Union and thus an important actor in fostering regional stability and security, which is regarded as a particular challenge (Presidency of the Republic, 2017, Remarks at German Marshall Fund). This role is perceived as positive for region and the government holds that opportunities are present, primarily in the field of natural gas (Cyprus MFA, 2016, Address by FM Kasoulides). As such, a certain interest exists to present the importance of Cyprus within the EU-context in areas of energy security and its neighborhood policy.

The Cypriot government stresses the importance of safeguarding its sovereignty in its issued statements. This proclivity arises from the Cyprus problem as practical reality and from external issues pertaining to maritime and natural gas issues. Its perception is that 37% of the island continues to be under occupation by Turkey and argues that attempts in obstructing the sovereign rights of Cyprus are present in efforts under taken by Turkey in Cyprus’s EEZ, which is referred to as gun-boat diplomacy (PIO, 2018, Address at Oil and Gas Forum), (Anastasiades, 2018, Address to Parliament).

Cyprus’s position and policies on its EEZ and natural gas discoveries, as opposed to Turkey’s, are viewed through the lens of the principle of sovereignty. It explicitly refutes the positions of Turkey and the Turkish Cypriots concerning their claims of the illegitimacy in concluding bilateral agreements as well as in natural gas-related activities. On that basis, Cyprus has refused to halt its natural gas activities when such requests have been made by The Turkish Cypriots (Presidency of the Republic, 2017, Anastasiades on the Cyprus problem). This testifies to a keen interest on the part of the Cypriot government to not to surrender what it regards as fundamental rights, but also to keep natural gas separate from the general negotiations of the Cyprus problem.

The Cypriot government perceives Turkey’s approach to the issue of natural gas and maritime areas within the context of protecting the rights of the Turkish Cypriots as baseless, thus taking a position in stark contrast with those of the TRNC and Turkey, which it views as working against the interests of all the Cypriots (PIO, 2018, Address on natural gas).
Cypriot government stands firm in its belief that the exploration and exploitation of natural gas is an inherent right given by the principle of sovereignty, arguing that the offshore natural resources belong to both Turkish and Greek Cypriots (PIO, 2018, Address at Oil and Gas Forum). A further indication of the attached importance to safeguard its sovereignty is reflected in the government’s interest not to enter into discussions on and associating maritime issues and natural gas in the reunification talks. This position is in turn reflected the government’s calls for the return of TRNC and Turkey to the negotiation table under the precondition that violations of its sovereign rights in the EEZ cease (PIO, 2018, Address on natural gas).

As such, natural gas and maritime issues are perceived as matters in which the republic of Cyprus, as the *de jure* legitimate state on the island, enjoy full rights to explore and utilize. Simultaneously, it maintains a view standing on previous agreements between the two Cypriot leaders that natural resources and decision on maritime areas will fall under the competences of a future united federal government. In this sense, the Cypriot government perceives itself as exercising its inherent rights but also as a ward of the island’s resources, which are to be shared upon unification. A concrete example that reflects this position is the step taken by the Cypriot government to set up a sovereign wealth fund in which any revenues would be placed in and shared upon reunification (PIO, 2018, Address at Oil and Gas Forum).

5.2 Preferential survival: Structural attempts and initiatives

5.2.1 Egypt: Relations with Cyprus and Israel and the benefits of natural gas

The State Information Services, in a report from 2018, presented arguments of the presidential spokesman on Egypt’s prospects to become a regional gas hub. It stated that, after a recent agreement between Israel’s *Delek Drilling* and Egyptian *Dolphinus Holding Company* on importing gas from Israel, Egypt now possesses the basic requirements to become a regional hub. The report describes the agreement in a positive manner declaring that Egypt is realizing the capabilities to transport, liquefy and distribute natural gas. For the Egyptian government, the agreement with Israel’s private sector is seen as positive as the report argues that it greatly benefits the Egyptian state (SIS, 2018, Egypt Becomes International Energy center).
Efforts undertaken in accordance with the Egyptian government’s aim of becoming a energy hub in the region, which is described as of major importance for Egypt’s domestic development, is further reflected in a series of statements concerning Egypt’s position on its relationship with regional actors. In 2017, president Sisi made a speech during a state visit to Cyprus, articulating Egypt’s perspective on the relation between the two countries. The statement takes a form where Sisi appraises the personal relationship with the Cypriot president, a friendship that is described as a great contribution to the increased bilateral relations in recent years. It argues that the historical bonds between the leaders and the peoples of Egypt and Cyprus serve as a base for the bilateral relationship and then argue, in an appealing manner, an incentive to increase cooperation in several areas so that the peoples can benefit from this relationship (SIS, statement with the Cypriot president, 2017). Further signs of a positive regard for Cyprus can be distilled in which Sisi speaks of an understanding on the part of the Cypriot president’s support of the current economic development in Egypt.

The statement describes the existence of economic and cultural bonds and in reference to these, it notes that ways of improving these bonds are being discussed. It refers to a new forum for Egyptian and Cypriot businesses that has been held and attended by the two leaders which, although it concerns the private sector, is to be seen as a way of promoting economic cooperation between the two countries (SIS, statement with the Cypriot president, 2017). In the statement, energy is highlighted in a promising manner and perceived as one of the most important areas that cooperation can be expanded in. An important argument on the role of energy is here described as a factor that can benefit the countries in the region, but also as a key factor for its peace and stability (SIS, statement with the Cypriot president, 2017). Moreover, the statement articulates, what the Egyptian government sees as positive potential for energy on a wider level, that the energy discoveries can assist Europe in its diversification efforts and argues that Cyprus and Egypt, given their strategic location, can have a significant role in regional energy matters. The statement displays the Egyptian government’s position on Cypriot rights in the Eastern Mediterranean in declaring Cyprus to have legitimate rights in using energy resources in its EEZ in line with international law and the existing EEZ agreements that Cyprus has signed (SIS, statement with the Cypriot president, 2017). Concerning the political situation in Cyprus, the statement speaks positively on the Cypriot president’s efforts to settle the Cyprus problem, describing the efforts as strenuous and noble.
Moreover, it details Egypt’s position on the matter in assuring support for a reunification of the two sides on the basis of the existing UN resolutions and the establishment of a federal state that is absent of any external interventions (SIS, statement with the Cypriot president, 2017).

The statement also demonstrate a like-minded view on regional and international issues as it describes that such matters were discussed among the leaders in which they reflected a consensus. On that basis, it was articulated that they would continue coordination and work to achieve regional stability and security (SIS, statement with the Cypriot president, 2017). In this statement, terrorism is argued to constitute another aspect of its relations with Cyprus, in which the government argues for an existing synergy between the states on regional matters, appraising military cooperation as an important element in the bilateral relations (SIS, statement with the Cypriot president, 2017).

Egypt’s view on its engagement in the Eastern Mediterranean and its relations with its neighbors was further articulated in a statement made by president Sisi in the context of a trilateral meeting between the Egyptian president and his Cypriot and Greek counterparts in November 2017. The statement highlighted that the Egyptian government considers the relations between the countries to be stable as a result of the existing cooperative mechanism. The cooperative effort is being described as having served the aim of increasing economic cooperation, but is also expressed with high confidence that it constitutes one of the primary pillars in preserving stability and security in the Eastern Mediterranean (SIS, Trilateral statement, 2017).

The statement places a particular emphasis on the Eastern Mediterranean region. It describes an interest in what the statement formulates as ‘restoring’ security and stability in the Eastern Mediterranean and argues that interests in undertaking these efforts are derived from a growing sense of responsibility for a region to which Egypt, Cyprus and Greece all belong. In this context, president Sisi assures that the Cyprus problem along with the Palestinian issue are considered to be of priority (SIS, Trilateral statement, 2017).

The importance of Egypt’s relationship with Cyprus is further displayed in a post issued by the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) on their official Facebook page. In the post “Shoukry receives the Cypriot Foreign Minister”, Foreign Affairs counselor Ahmed Abu Zeid recounts Foreign Ministry Shoukry’s statements on the visit in which the high regard is
placed on the Cypriot-Egyptian relations. In particular, it notes cooperative efforts on cultural, economic, political and military levels as a testimony of the two countries long-held bilateral relationship (Facebook, 2018, Egypt MFA on Cyprus). The post also displays an interest on the part of the governments in committing themselves in cooperative efforts concerning energy, as it states that ways of enhancing energy cooperation was discussed. Moreover, it also pointed to a certain level in their relationship seeing as it noted that they discussed challenges for Cyprus, particularly linked to gas exploration in its EEZ (Facebook, 2018, Egypt MFA on Cyprus).

Concerning maritime zones in the Eastern Mediterranean, a post made in February 2018 on the MFA’s Facebook page indicated a firm position of the Egyptian government on the Cypriot-Egyptian EEZ agreement, affirming the legitimacy of the agreement in stating that the agreement is indisputable by “any part” as it is placed at the United Nations as an international treaty (Facebook, 2018, Egypt MFA on Egypt-Cypriot EEZ). By stating, in a resolute manner, that any attempts to target or undermine Egypt’s sovereign rights will be met with confrontation and rejection (Facebook, 2018, Egypt MFA on Egypt-Cypriot EEZ), it demonstrates clear Egyptian support for Cyprus rights to enter into bilateral agreements as well as operating within its EEZ.

5.2.2. Israel: Begin-Sadat Agreement today and regional engagement with Cyprus

In the statement, the peace between Israel and Egypt is regarded as basis for stability in a region that is otherwise unstable. Although it characterizes the peace as imperfect, the importance of it becomes evident seeing it is argued to be to both countries benefit and that it has managed to last for forty years (Prime Minister’s Office, 2017, Knesset). The statement highlights one primary factor, concerning Israel’s security, which is described as fundamental to the establishment of peace. As has been noted above, Israel considers its power or strength a natural precondition for peace, and therefore its alliances in the Middle East are only forged with the strong. This illustrates Israel’s view that peace can only result from gaining credibility among its neighbors, thereby enhancing its power. This notion is argued to be true as the statement frames Sadat’s visit and the Egyptian recognition of Israel’s existence is claimed to have been were made out of the awareness of Israel’s power (Prime Minister’s Office, 2017, Knesset).
Concerning Israel’s contemporary relations with Egypt, the statement describes the peace as constituting a strategic relationship between the two countries. It highlights that the relations between the two states, especially during the tenure of president Sisi, have developed. An indication of the extent to which the two countries communicate with each other is displayed by the statement’s acknowledgment of the existence of open channels of communication, which are argued to be of importance for both states. In the statement, Netanyahu describes his meeting with Sisi that took place in New York to have greatly contributed to the strengthening of the existing relations. This testifies not only to a view held by Netanyahu on the relations between the two states as positive, but also that the working-relationship between the two leaders is being viewed as positive (Prime Minister’s Office, 2017, Knesset).

The Israeli government public opinion in Egypt as the primary challenge to improved Egyptian-Israeli relations. From the text, a view on the part of Netanyahu is that the Israeli government’s relationship with the Egyptian leadership is robust. However, it describes the majority of the public to have been subjected to misguided information about Israel. Here, an effort to change the perception of Israel is articulated in order to attain what it describes as a “warm peace” (Prime Minister’s Office, 2017, Knesset). In essence, it describes an effort to attain legitimacy not only by the respective state, but also by the society in its entirety, which displays interest in expanding the relations in areas of people’s relations, economy, culture and tourism.

In the field of economic relations, the private sectors of both countries did manage to develop these in terms of an export agreement of Israeli gas to Egypt. In a statement, Netanyahu spoke on its importance that the Israeli government ascribed to the deal. It is appraised as a historic action that will not only increase economic prosperity in Israel due to revenues, but it is also framed within Israel’s larger goals in improving security and relations with its neighbors (Prime Minister’s Office, 2018, Netanyahu on Egypt gas deal).

As the statements above displays Israel’s relations with its immediate neighbors are to a large extent tacit and primarily centered around governmental and economic cooperation, primarily due to an absence in people-to-people, cultural and economic relations. As mentioned above, there is an interest on the part of the Israeli government to develop these absent aspects between the countries.
The orientation of Israel’s policy, seen from various statements released under the years 2017-2018, also puts emphasis on its relations with The Republic of Cyprus and Greece, both countries situated in relative close proximity to Israel. A statement released by the Israeli Foreign Ministry describes Israel’s aims and efforts in engaging its neighbors in the Eastern Mediterranean. The relations between Israel, Cyprus and Greece, as seen from the document, are described in a positive manner in which cooperation is sought in areas of energy, communication, development and economic growth (Israel MFA, 2017, Trilateral meeting). The statement, in referring to intergovernmental talks with both Cyprus and Greece, describes the primary aims of the Israeli effort to increase the existing relations, which are seen as a basis to facilitate what is described as strategic cooperation with the countries. In this context, a part from addressing strategic issues, the relations are also appraised as a way in which other regional issues can be discussed (Israel MFA, 2017, Trilateral meeting).

Perceptions on Israeli-Cypriot relations were further highlighted in a statement issued by Netanyahu during the visit of Cypriot President Nicos Anastasiades in Israel. The statement focused primarily on the contemporary relations in which the impetus for bilateral cooperation was described to derive from the fact that their two countries are small democracies in the Eastern Mediterranean. Moreover, it argues that the two governments possess shared views on regional challenges and displays the current level of relationship to materialize in cooperation in fields of security, natural gas, emergency, commerce as well as tourism, describing these in a very positive manner as areas of common opportunities (Prime Minister’s Office, 2016, Bilateral meeting). In appraising the Cypriot assistance in fighting an Israeli forest fire along with a reciprocal Israeli assistance to the Cypriots themselves (Prime Minister’s Office, 2016, Bilateral meeting) the statement presents these events as natural acts of friendship. The Israeli-Cypriot relations, seen in relative terms to Israel’s relationship with Egypt, as far as the statements are concerned, indicates a significantly more matured level of the relationship.

Concrete actions outlined in the statements concern both areas of economy, such as energy but also levels of cultural cooperation. Energy matters, particularly natural gas and the East Med Pipeline are appraised as having a revolutionary potential and the statements displays a commitment to it (Prime Minister’s Office, 2017, Trilateral meeting). In cultural matters, the statement expresses agreement in terms of establishing exchanges of students from the three countries in order to foster cultural exchange and innovation. This aspect of
cooperation is regarded to be of major significance (Prime Minister’s Office, 2017, Trilateral meeting), particularly in terms of the existing mutual interest to cooperate on both levels of state, economy and culture.

In terms of expressing ideas on Cypriot matters, the Israel has signaled its position on Cypriot maritime rights as indicated by a statement on twitter, issued by the Israeli MFA in 2018. The statement, released in the context of a visit of the Cypriot foreign minister in which energy and regional developments was discussed, argued that Greek Cypriot activities in its maritime zones is respected by Israel and that the eight year old EEZ agreement affirms this position (Israel MFA, 2018 Tweet on Cyprus EEZ). Israel has further indication a standpoint regarding the Cyprus problem, in particularly concerning the Turkish presence on the island. In a release issued by the Israeli MFA, responding to what it the statement describes as Turkish efforts in lecturing Israel on regional issues, it characterized the Turkish presence on the island of Cyprus as an occupation (Israeli MFA, 2017, response to Turkish MFA statement).

This form of opinionated rhetoric speaks not only to the bilateral relations between Israel and Cyprus. A second aspect of it very much reflects the contemporary relations between Turkey and Israel. However, in terms of natural gas, there are indications that the Israeli government finds Turkey to be a suitable partner. The document “Israeli Gas Opportunities” (2017), released by the Israeli Ministry of Energy, presents Turkey as a third export alternative, in relation to the East Med Pipeline and Egypt (Israeli Ministry of Energy, 2017). The two countries, as has been noted in previous chapters, are not alien to cooperation. Despite the existing political tensions, this indicates a continued Israeli regard of Turkey’s role, particularly in terms of energy. However, seen in relative terms to its existing energy cooperation with Cyprus and Egypt, it appears to be on the back burner.

5.2.3 Turkey: Regional engagement in line with the Turkish-Cypriots

Turkish interests in the Eastern Mediterranean go beyond the direct national security interests and challenges, which were described in the first section on this chapter. One additional form of Turkish presence in the Eastern Mediterranean comes in the form of its relationship with the TRNC. This relationship has two distinct aspects: one aspect is the Turkish role and its support to TRNC in negotiating efforts on the Cyprus problem and the second is related to the former and concerns maritime issues in the Eastern Mediterranean. The event in Cyprus of 1974, which saw Turkish forces deployed on the island, are referred to as a “peace operation”, by President Erdogan in a statement addressed to the Turkish Cypriot leader Mustafa Akinci
In the statement, the Turkish president articulated assurances of the Turkish government to stand together with the Turkish Cypriots in support of the TRNC in its commitment to guarantee stability on the island and the Eastern Mediterranean region. The statement further indicated the Turkish government’s intent to play a more active role on the island based on a perception that the Turkish Cypriots are finding themselves in a situation where they are victims subjected to restriction as a result of a deadlock on the island (Presidency of the Republic of Turkey, 2017, Message on July 20 Day).

Concerning cooperation with the Turkish Cypriots and its aims as stated by Turkish Foreign Minister Çavuşoğlu in an interview, he argued that the interest of the TRNC and Turkey are equal in attaining a lasting comprehensive settlement of the Cyprus problem. The Turkish government perceives the status quo on the island to be unacceptable to both Greek and Turkish Cypriots. It argues that the time to reach a comprehensive settlement within the present parameters is running out and argued in 2017 that Crans-Montana was the last chance (Turkish MFA, 2017, Phileleftheros). This perception is held against the fifty years of failed negotiations. In this context, the statement affirms a constant support for TRNC and suggests that the Greek Cypriots ought to carefully study their own long-term interests in relation to any possible outcome (Turkish MFA, 2017, Phileleftheros).

As articulated by its foreign minister Çavuşoğlu in 2018, Turkey’s perception on any negotiation attempts is that these ought to be grounded in diplomacy and dialogue. The Turkish government attributes the failure in Crans-Montana to Greek Cypriot unwillingness to share power with the Turkish Cypriots and argues that future negotiations within a similar format is guaranteed to break down absent of a change on the part of the Greek Cypriots (Turkish MFA, 2018, Kathimerini). The Turkish government feels that such a change by the Greek Cypriots is not likely and vows, in its capacity as a guarantor power, never to allow a settlement in which the Turkish Cypriots constitutes a mere minority. For Turkey, this notion gives rise to a question on what form a new negotiated settlement will have and what its particular goals will be (Turkish MFA, 2018, Kathimerini), hinting on a possibility that the Turkish government, under certain circumstances, can come support negotiations under a framework different than the current one which is that of a bi-communal, bi-zonal federation.
Concerning natural gas exploration and maritime affairs in the Eastern Mediterranean, the Turkish Government perceives the matter as linked to the Cyprus problem, arguing that Greek Cypriot actions, in issuing exploration licenses and delineating EEZ’s, are discriminatory to the Turkish Cypriots, which Turkey views as co-owners of the island and therefore also has clear rights on this matter. Therefore, Turkey, together with the Turkish Cypriots, insists on the illegitimacy of what they perceive as unilateral actions taken by the Greek Cypriots (Turkish MFA, 2018, Kathimerini). The spokesman for the Turkish president, Ibrahim Kalin, argued in 2018 the Turkish government’s insistence on creating an atmosphere of common benefit and reconciliation in the Eastern Mediterranean as opposed to the current climate of disagreement. For this to be realized the Turkish government insists on the Turkish and Greek Cypriots to work together collaboratively, an effort that the Turkish government expresses its support to. In such an eventuality, it is argued that Turkey is open to include Greece and “other countries” in the region (Presidency of the Republic of Turkey, 2018, Spokesman Kalin) hinting on Egypt and primarily Israel as possible parties to such a framework.

Efforts in bringing together the Cypriot sides, as articulated by the spokesman, is a held principle on joint collaboration between the Greek and Turkish Cypriots in exploring the waters around the island. According to the Turkish government, this principle continues to be violated by the Greek Cypriots in their insistence on that the maritime zones belong to them only (Presidency of the Republic of Turkey, 2018, Spokesman Kalin). The Turkish position becomes contradictory, concerning maritime zones, because on the one hand it contests bilateral agreements signed by the Greek Cypriots, and on the other argues that it disputes particular areas that overlap with those claimed by Turkey (Presidency of the Republic of Turkey, 2018, Spokesman Kalin).

This suggests two different and yet related aspects of Turkish interests. As far as its own maritime claims are concerned, it seems inclined to approach the issue from a perspective of maritime law considers Republic of Cyprus’s EEZ to overlap with its continental shelf. At the same time, according to the Turkish government, it acknowledges parts of the EEZ that does not overlap with Turkey’s own claims. In the event that the Greek and Turkish Cypriots were to jointly cooperate, the EEZ, excluding those areas claimed by Turkey, would be therefore presumable considered to be legal. However, if Greek Cypriots continues to leave TRNC out of the matter, the argument that follows is that Turkey is prepared to take whatever actions deemed necessary to safeguard TRNC rights (Presidency of the Republic of Turkey, 2018, Spokesman Kalin). These positions put forward by the Turkish Government therefore raises
several ambiguities concerning in which areas and under what circumstances Turkey is prepared to act according to its own interest and those of the TRNC.

As a result of what it perceives as continuous disregard of the Turkish Cypriots, Turkey and the TRNC has responded by awarding offshore licenses to Turkish Petroleum Corporation (TPAO). The Turkish government argues these agreements to constitute a legal basis upon which it intends to stand when its drillship starts its planned activities, as requested by TRNC, in the Eastern Mediterranean (Turkish MFA, 2018, Kathimerini).

In a Turkish MFA press release on Greek-Cypriot gas-related activities in the Eastern Mediterranean, issued within the context of attempted drillings in block 3 South East of Famagusta, the Turkish government affirmed its commitment to TRNC and noted its continued exclusion despite repeated warnings from Turkey. The statement affirms the commitment of the Turkish government to address exploration and drilling activities by any means necessary in coordination with the TRNC (Turkish MFA, 2018, Press release on GC). The statement displays the seriousness with which the Turkish government perceives as unilateral hydrocarbon activities in the Eastern Mediterranean by the Greek Cypriots, arguing that the Greek Cypriots will be solely to blame for any eventualities that may arise as a result of its present conduct (Turkish MFA, 2018, Press release on GC).

The interconnectedness between the Cyprus problem and natural gas, as viewed by the Turkish Cypriots, is further articulated in its perception that continued exclusion of the Turkish Cypriots from hydrocarbon exploration testifies to a Greek Cypriot unwillingness to share power and wealth among the communities, which was demonstrated in Crans-Montana in 2017. Despite the perception that Turkish Cypriot exclusion hampers prospects of a negotiated settlement, the Turkish government maintains a view that the present course of the Greek Cypriots puts the stability and security in the Eastern Mediterranean region at risk and argues that international companies stand to refrain from cooperation with the Greek Cypriots in the field of hydrocarbons (Turkish MFA, 2018, Press release on GC).

5.2.4 Republic of Cyprus: Regional engagement with Israel and Egypt

In terms of regional engagement, the development of relations with Egypt and Israel is perceived by the Cypriot government to be a national strategic interest. These relationships are manifested on a bilateral as well as on trilateral levels, where two trilateral constellations
exist, one with Cyprus, Israel and Greece and one with Cyprus, Egypt and Greece. The forms of cooperation are seen by the Cypriot government as positive and argued to be able to contribute to solving the regional challenges in the region. As such, they take form in areas of defense, security, energy as well as maritime issues, counter-terrorism and tourism (Cypriot MFA, 2017, Address at OSCE MED). In addition, the Cypriot government perceives the existence of these cooperative frameworks to reflect a common understanding in the idea that they constitute positive means to enhance peace, stability and dialogue in the Eastern Mediterranean (Presidency of the Republic, 2017, German Marshall Fund).

Therefore, the articulated goals of these frameworks, as argued by the Cypriot government, is to establish positive relations amongst the neighboring states in the Eastern Mediterranean that is based upon a common understanding of the need for territorial integrity, intolerance of interference in internal matters of states based upon the principle of sovereignty and independence (Presidency of the Republic, 2017, German Marshall Fund).

Within these frameworks, the Cypriot government emphasizes the role of energy, particular natural gas, as an important aspect in the good relations among its partners in the region. Natural gas is thus perceived to have a propelling role in facilitating cooperation, which in turn enables the Eastern Mediterranean region to be transformed into a stable and peaceful cooperative area that allows the states to promote their strategic interests (Presidency of the Republic, 2017, German Marshall Fund).

Within its Eastern Mediterranean outlook, the Cypriot government perceives Israel as a close partner with which it has grown relations exponentially. The bilateral relationship, as viewed by the Cypriot government, is guided by a common notion of friendship and a shared geostrategic vision in promoting regional stability and peace, taking stance against any forms of “gunboat diplomacy” (Presidency of the Republic, 2017, American Jewish Committee). This description points to the keen interest of the Cypriot government, as mentioned above, to facilitate support from its regional partners on the importance of sovereign rights and independence.

Aside from the regional significance, the relationship between Israel and Cyprus is described as a means with which it constitutes a important partner for the west, primarily in terms of the two states being democracies that are relatively stable in contrast to the greater Middle Eastern region (Presidency of the Republic, 2017, American Jewish Committee).
The Cypriot government appears to place further significance on its relationship with Israel, holding the view that it is prepared to assist Israel in serious emergencies. This commitment is displayed in the argument that the relationship provides for, aside from the promoting regional security, economic cooperation, a contribution to Israel’s strategic depth (Presidency of the Republic, 2017, American Jewish Committee). This adds a separate, but yet important dimension that provides an indication into the substance of the bilateral relations.

On the trilateral level, Cyprus’s engagement with Israel and Egypt is portrayed as a success by the Cypriot government in terms of its ambitions in the Eastern Mediterranean. Israel and Egypt are part of separate trilateral groups and a reasonable interpretation why this is the case is the sensitivity open relations are present in the Egyptian society. Nevertheless, the Cypriot government views the relations between Israel and Egypt as positive arguing that the recent agreement struck by the two states’ private sectors on natural gas export testifies to this. The Cypriot government, in this context, expresses a clear interest in taking part in future developments between the two (PIO, 2018, 9th Oil and Gas Forum), indicating that it eventually favors open cooperation among the three states.

Concrete engagement taken in the context of the trilateral groups testifies to a synergy existent among the Eastern Mediterranean states on maritime, natural gas issues but also concerning the Cyprus issue. As displayed by the joint-declaration issued by Cypriot President Anastasiades, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Greek Prime minister Alexis Tsipras following the 4th trilateral summit in Nicosia, a clear commitment exists in working cooperatively to promote peace and prosperity in the Eastern Mediterranean region.

The statement displays a common standpoint on the maritime areas in Eastern Mediterranean and the Aegean Seas, expressing full support to the Cypriot government in recognizing its sovereign rights in its EEZ. Stopping short of mentioning Turkey explicitly, it refers to “recent” illegal activities in the Eastern Mediterranean, seeing these as violations of international law that squander relations between the regional states (PIO, 2018, 4th Trilateral Summit). In terms of energy cooperation, a common view is present that the East Med Pipeline serves as a feasible project of a strategic character, affirming it as an interest of both the regional countries and the European Union (PIO, 2018, 4th Trilateral Summit).
Moreover, the statement displays a convergence between the parties on the Cyprus problem on the importance of a comprehensive settlement, which in itself is argued to be positive for peace and stability in the region. Most significantly, the statement presents a shared view that a settlement of the Cyprus issue ought to be formed on the basis of exclusion of foreign troops on the island (PIO, 2018, 4th Trilateral Summit).

Similar interests, as those above, are noted from Egypt, Cyprus and Greece, the second trilateral group. As seen in a joint-statement issued by the presidents of Cyprus and Egypt and the prime minister of Greece, a clear understanding of the common challenges in the region exist among the three governments, particularly in terms of the need to diversify energy resources and routes. In the context of cooperation, energy is perceived as a factor upon which the countries can build upon their existing relationships (Cyprus MFA, 2017, 5th Trilateral Summit). Common interests on regional security and terrorism are also presented as challenges that require further cooperation between the states.

The existing synergy between the participants in the first trilateral group on maritime, energy and the Cyprus problem appears to exist in the second group. In a similar manner, the statement emphasizes the need for a UN-negotiated settlement of the Cyprus problem absent any intervention rights or presence of foreign troops (Cyprus MFA, 2017, 5th Trilateral Summit), displaying the position of Egypt to stand in line with the position of the Cypriot and Israeli government. Views on maritime issues in the Eastern Mediterranean also appear to meet with and, in rhetorical terms, exceed those of the joint-statement issued by the Israel-Cyprus-Greece trilateral. In the statement issued by Cyprus-Egypt-Greece, the leaders explicitly put Turkey on notice by urging it to halt illegal activities within the maritime-areas of Cyprus (Cyprus MFA, 2017, 5th Trilateral Summit). This indicates that a clear common position on the legitimacy of Cyprus’s EEZ’s but also displays a held perception of Turkey as the regional aggressor.

5.3 The domestic and social fabric: Effects on inter-state relations

5.3.1 Egypt: Social change and cultural ties with regional partners

The aim of maintaining security and stability in the Eastern Mediterranean is further noted in the context of historical relations between the states. Although the statement explicitly argues
that it was not the time to mention what it describes as strong relations between the countries throughout history or to appraise their respective civilizations’ contribution to humanity (SIS, Trilateral statement, 2017). However, these historical bonds are nevertheless mentioned and used as a means of introducing common areas of cooperation. It describes a shared historical experience between Cypriots, Greeks and Egyptians where the two former have had diasporas in living in Egypt. In this context, an initiative aimed at bringing people back from Cyprus and Greece for a week called “The Egyptian Cypriot and Greek Communities to Revive the Roots” is planned during 2018 (SIS, Trilateral statement, 2017).

History, institutional importance and the notion of the ‘homeland’ are themes that frequently appear in statements addressed to the domestic scene. In the end of January 2018, a specific conference named the “Story of Homeland” was held at the Al Masa Hotel in Cairo. In its closing speech, president Sisi specifically pointed out the significance of Egypt’s history, its people and institutions has in terms of the future (SIS, 2018 Story of Homeland). In the statement, Sisi articulates his perception of the Egyptian nation as having gone through one of the greatest difficulties and critical times in its history (SIS, 2018 Story of Homeland). Recalling the experience from the conference, through listening to participants from all sectors of the society, it is argued that the people present reflect the will of the general population of Egypt, particularly their interest in building a democratic and modern state, arguing that this goal is present in all Egyptians (SIS, 2018 Story of Homeland).

The statement apprised the Egyptian people, stating that Egypt has the Egyptians themselves to thank for in defending and preserving the Egyptian state as well as for Egypt’s development and reconstruction. The statement lifts two engineers as models for the development project in Egypt and, in the same sentence, refers to the army and police as defenders of Egypt’s security. In the same passage, the statement labels farmers as heroes and worker in their contribution of hope and spirit and the army, as all of those who confronted what the statement characterizes as dark forces that attacked the homeland (SIS, 2018 Story of Homeland).

The statement places high emphasis on the time since 2011, particularly as it constitutes a experience for the nation. It argues that the people of the world have to watch Egypt due to the fact that everything that is being done, especially during the last four years, are to be seen as a continuation of that experience (SIS, 2018 Story of Homeland). In the same passage it argues that the experience, which is epitomized by a people who seek to change their future,
makes all of humanity worth in noticing it. Along with that passage, it lifts a religious argument in what the statement calls the ‘Lord Almighty’ who wanted to see change and so it would be completed (SIS, 2018 Story of Homeland).

The notion of historical and cultural bonds between the peoples of Egypt and Cyprus as well as its leaders were further addressed, elaborated on and argued for by Sisi in his speech before the Cypriot Parliament. The statement articulates gratefulness on the part of Sisi to be able to address the parliament in session, which as he argues, demonstrates the existence of democratic principles despite the Cypriot problem. An expression was made in which he referred to the Turkish Cypriot community and its existing absence from any political participation in the Cypriot parliament, stating that he had wished that he would have made his attendance in front of the full parliamentary body (SIS, Cypriot Parliament Speech, 2017).

The statement expresses support from the Egyptian government for a peaceful settlement of the Cyprus problem and commends the efforts by the parliamentarians and the Cypriot president in the settlement process, arguing that a solution is important for the entire Eastern Mediterranean region (SIS, Cypriot Parliament Speech, 2017). The majority of the statement speaks on the intent of the government of Egypt to strengthen bilateral relation and emphasizes that in the aftermath of the Egyptian revolution of June 30, 2013, the Egyptian people is thankful because of Cyprus support as the 2013 revolution reflected the desires of the Egyptian people in establishing a modern civil state and democratic participation (SIS, Cypriot Parliament Speech, 2017).

Going back further into history in lining out the relations between the two states, the statement highlights the Cypriot citizens that have resided in Egypt for extensive periods where ties between these Cypriots and Egyptians are still present. In this light, the statement goes as far as describing Egypt as a second homeland for that portion of Cypriots (SIS, Cypriot Parliament Speech, 2017). The statement also emphasizes historical reciprocal political support, mentioning Egypt’s supportive stance on Cypriot independence in the 1960’s and describes the relationship between President Nasser and President Makarios as one of friendship. In particular, it highlights President Makarios’s support for The Non-Align Movement (NAM) (SIS, Cypriot Parliament Speech, 2017).
These references of a shared political and cultural history are perceived by the Egyptian government to constitute a framework in which it today is seeking to enhance bilateral relations. Apart from the existing relations, it describes a desire to start a Parliamentary Friendship Association with the aim of increasing what is labels as the ‘people’s dimension’ in the overall bilateral relationship (SIS, Cypriot Parliament Speech, 2017).

5.3.2 Israel: Interpersonal relationships and democracy for cooperation

For Israel, history widely appears and is referred to in its political statements, often as a way of informing where the country is today. In a memorial service, Benjamin Netanyahu made a public address in which he spoke in appraisal on the legacy of Israel’s first prime minister. The statement described and appraised the leader, arguing that Ben Gurion laid down the foundations for Israel, particularly concerning the conception on the security of Israel, which in turn is argued to inform the contemporary conception of security and survival and policy in Israel (Prime Minister’s Office, 2017, Ben Gurion).

Almost the entirety of the speech’s content addresses topics on which Netanyahu and Ben Gurion agree and connects it with contemporary actions and goals. However, it can be noted that there were areas, which he did not agree with Ben Gurion, such as the establishment of large cities which Ben Gurion quoted said are not good for humanity. The difference is acknowledged and spoken on further, however within the context that it was purely a question of differences of opinions on economy (Prime Minister’s Office, 2017, Ben Gurion).

The core of the speech concerns the security and survival of Israel and argues that Ben Gurion understood that Israel’s continued existence is dependent upon efforts to increase its strength (Prime Minister’s Office, 2017, Ben Gurion). The content in this particular articulation is composed of two parts: on the one hand, it states an argued position, that of Ben Gurion. On the other, it tacitly displays that what was understood, the idea of Israel’s dependency on a constant increase of strength, is the view of Netanyahu himself (Prime Minister’s Office, 2017, Ben Gurion).

The argument that Israel’s survival and future are dependent upon its people is further highlighted in the statement where Netanyahu notes that two generations of Israelis has passed since it’s founding. It notes a process, as described in the statement, in which Israel is developing into a regional superpower and a global power as a result of a systematic
improvement of Israel’s military and economic strength. (Prime Minister’s Office, 2017, Ben Gurion)

Concerning the displayed perception of Israeli domestic society and its characteristics, the statement describes today’s Israel as a moral, democratic and free country with a society that is vibrant and polemic (Prime Minister’s Office, 2017, Ben Gurion). This societal composition is in turn argued to inform the social consciousness, as displayed by the perceived idea that Israel as a country always presses forward rather to remains content of what already is (Prime Minister’s Office, 2017, Ben Gurion).

Historical arguments continue to appear in the statement in terms of explaining contemporary foreign relations. It argues a conception held by Ben Gurion to address Arab hostility by way of forging relations with states beyond Israel’s immediate surroundings, particularly with Iran, Turkey and Ethiopia. The statement expresses a view in accordance of this notion, but argues the region to have changed, referring to the above-mentioned states. However, the idea of binding relations with countries is still acknowledged and the statement describes its contemporary bilateral relations in a positive manner (Prime Minister’s Office, 2017, Ben Gurion). The change in the region that has occurred, explicitly Israel’s relations with the Arab states, is further highlighted in which a positive position on the part of the Israeli government can be disseminated. This is reflected in the statement where it articulates Israel’s relations with the Arab states to be in a state of growth, emphasizing a common interest to confront what it describes as radical Islam.

This contemporary conception on Arab-Israeli relations appears to be historically justified in the statement by way of a reference to Ben Gurion’s idea that the successes of Israel’s enterprise must spill over onto its neighbors, in which they will ultimately result in cooperation (Prime Minister’s Office, 2017, Ben Gurion). The statement further speaks on the substance of these relations as being tacitly performed. However, one can note a display of interest, on the part of the Israeli government, to have these relations improved and conducted in the open (Prime Minister’s Office, 2017, Ben Gurion).

Lastly, the current Israeli security doctrine is mentioned and appraised as having its roots from the thinking of Ben Gurion, particularly in his ideas on the importance of strength and taking the battle to the territory of the aggressors. The statement concurs in explicit terms with
this idea and ascribes the development in both military and intelligence fields to be guided by this basic perception (Prime Minister’s Office, 2017, Ben Gurion).

The level of the relationship with Cyprus and Greece appears to be of particular importance in the view of the Israeli government. Strategic and regional issues aside, Netanyahu further elaborated on the significance of Israel’s relationship with Cyprus and Greece. In the statement, Netanyahu displays a personal regard for the two leaders on the part of Netanyahu, in which he refers to them as dear friends. History is here referred to as informing the present relations, particularly the emphasis on the historical intermingling of Greek and Jewish cultures in Thessaloniki. It describes the contemporary relationship among the three countries as two pillars, those of Athens and Jerusalem with Cyprus in the middle (Prime Minister’s Office, 2017, Trilateral meeting).

These historical bonds are argued to have constituted mutual moral conceptions on values of human freedom and equal rights upon which all three countries stand on today. In addition to the intermingling of Greek and Jewish cultures, the statement argues that these common values are rooted in religion, and the idea that all people of god are to enjoy equal rights (Prime Minister’s Office, 2017, Trilateral meeting).

Moreover, the statement argues the commonality of democracy as an essential factor for developing relations between the Israel, Cyprus and Greece. This commonality in democracy appears to be of significance on the part of the Israeli government as it is mentioned in contrast to Israel’s Middle Eastern neighbors, which are described to possess it in low quantity (Prime Minister’s Office, 2017, Trilateral meeting).

Regarding its immediate Arab neighbors, the relationship between Israel and Egypt appears to stand out. In the statement, Netanyahu addressed the Knesset in which he spoke on the history between the two countries, particularly the peace agreement, and the role of Egypt in the Palestinian issue but also appraised the contemporary relationship and future efforts.

The meaning of Sadat’s visit to the Knesset, in which Egypt came to recognize the existence of the Israeli state, is described in the statement as to have changed history. The importance of this event is further displayed in the statement where it argues that the forty minutes it took Sadat to fly between Egypt and Israel was faster, but no less dramatic than the forty years it took the Jewish people to cross the Sinai desert. Further illustrating the
significance of the peace, the statement reaches back into history and in a very simplistic manner refers to the ancient Jewish and Egyptian people that crossed each other’s paths and later as two nations were engaged in war with each other but who had now overcome their hostilities (Prime Minister’s Office, 2017, Knesset)

5.3.3 Turkey: Domestic spirit and Turkey as a Motherland

Ideas and historical notions of the Turkish history pertaining to its domestic society and the body politic are often presented to as a way of reflecting on the current situation and to shape efforts of the Turkish government in taking the country forward. Historical events that are considered of particular importance and referred to by the President Erdoğan are the Canakkale Victory and the War of Independence. The former is described solidified the Turkish land as an eternal home for its people, ushering in a sense of inspiration and love for Turkey as an independent state (The Presidency of the Republic of Turkey, 2018, March 18th Martyrs).

This inspiration, as argued in the statement, ultimately informed victory in the Turkish War of Independence, along with Mustafa Kemal, who is appraised in his efforts in founding the modern republic (The Presidency of the Republic of Turkey, 2018, March 18th Martyrs). During the celebration of the War of Independence, particularly the August 30th Victory day, Erdoğan noted that this event was not only celebrated by Turkey, but together with the Turkish Cypriots, which he describes as brothers to the Turkey (The Presidency of the Republic of Turkey, 2018, Erdoğan August 30 Message). Such an articulation indicates a held perception of a deep historical and cultural bond between the two peoples. The cultural ties are further reflected in the held notion by the Turkish government that Turkey is the Motherland of the Turkish Cypriots and regardless of a unity of Cyprus, this role would still be present (Turkish MFA, 2017, Phileleftheros).

A part from the appraisal of the founding of the modern Turkish state in 1923, a notion of drawing upon the cultural aspect of the Turkish people, predating the republic, is seen to be present in the statement that highlights that the Turkish Nation was once more proclaimed in 1923. The spirit of inspiration in the Turkish Nation is presented as something that has persisted throughout the Canakkale Victory, the War of Independence and continues to be present in the Turkish republic today (The Presidency of the Republic of Turkey, 2018, March 18th Martyrs), pointing to a perceived cultural aspect that is both a part of, but not exclusive to the Turkish state.
This alleged spirit that is present in Turkish society and its continued commitment to Turkey, as argued by President Erdoğan, were displayed during the events of July 15 coup d’état. In the same sense that this commitment had contributed to Turkish independence, today it is reflected in the way Turkey stands against what it perceives as plots by various terrorist organizations. The events are described as having brought about entirety of the Turkish Nation to respond in order to protect the Turkish republic from the Gülenists, referred to as the Fetullah Terrorist Organization (FETO) (The Presidency of the Republic of Turkey, 2018, March 18th Martyrs). The commitment of the Turkish government to uphold independence is further argued to be reflected in Turkish efforts outside the country, noting its Operation Olive Branch as an example as a effort to ensure the future of Turkey (The Presidency of the Republic of Turkey, 2018, March 18th Martyrs).

The statement articulates a held notion of pride in being a part to an independent nation where everyone constantly is engaged in efforts to serve the country. The government argues that the social and foreign policy reforms that have been undertaken in the last fifteen years, under the leadership of Erdoğan, reflects the general effort to serve the country (The Presidency of the Republic of Turkey, 2018, March 18th Martyrs).

5.3.4 Republic of Cyprus: Democracy for cooperation and cultural ties

The Cypriot-Egyptian relationship is argued, similarly to the one with Israel, to be underpinned by common historic ties, primarily through diasporas in their respective countries (Cyprus MFA, 2017, 5th Trilateral Summit). This cultural aspect is presented and developed as a means to increase the cultural as well as the interpersonal relationships between the states.

A concrete example of efforts to increase the cultural aspect in the overall cooperation between the countries is the cultural Nostos week, held in Alexandria at the end of April 2018, with focus on diaspora. The event was perceived by the Cypriot government as a demonstration of the close relations between Cyprus and Egypt (PIO, 2018, President leaves for Egypt).

The Cypriot government emphasizes its significant historical roots with Israel, particularly within the context of relations between the Cypriot and Jewish peoples. Addressing the American Jewish Committee, Cypriot president Anastasiades emphasized that this history is deeply respected by the Cypriot government, noting that Cyprus appear as the only country
that is mentioned in the Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmud. Further expressions that are present in the statement argue for the historical relationship between the two peoples as Jewish refugees lived in Cyprus during the Ottoman Empire, embracing Cyprus as their home (Presidency of the Republic, 2017, American Jewish Committee).

Connecting to more recent history of the contemporary relationship, the Cypriot government draws upon Cypriot assistance to Jews migrating from Europe to their new home in the Middle East, in which 53,000 people stayed for a period in Cyprus and was given assistance in terms of housing. These events are portrayed by the Cypriot government as acts of Cypriot solidarity towards the Jewish people and a display of historical friendship (PIO, 2018, MFA celebration of Cypriot and Jewish Communities). Moreover, statements issued by the government argues for a common experience in terms of persecution and displacement, articulating that in the Cypriot collective memory, a notion of determination to start a new life and to build a state exist in a similar manner as was existent in the minds of the Jews (PIO, 2018, MFA celebration of Cypriot and Jewish Communities).

Although the contemporary relationship is perceived by the Cypriot government to be one of strategic cooperation, is perceived as having matured form the close historical and cultural bonds between Cyprus and Israel and its peoples. Within this context, the Cypriot government holds that another aspect that explains the connectedness with Israel is the presence of common ideas on democratic values and stability in the region (Presidency of the Republic, 2017, American Jewish Committee).

6. Conclusion

This thesis has, through the theoretical perspectives of classical, structural, neoclassical realism and constructivism, explored the nature of interest-formation and state-action of Egypt, Israel, Cyprus and Turkey in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Question I
In response to the first question “How can the interests of Cyprus, Turkey, Israel and Egypt, particularly in terms of hydrocarbons in the Eastern Mediterranean, be explained individually?” the research finds corresponding views of Egypt, Israel, and Cyprus in their regional outlook as displayed by similar and at times duplicated political activities. They are
engaged with one another in both bilateral and trilateral frameworks in which Cyprus appear as a central node. The substance of these frameworks concerns areas of energy and security, and are seen as positive for regional peace and stability. In other words, by aligning with each other within bilateral and trilateral structures, they essentially engage in *external balancing efforts* to reduce risk in the region.

However, these views appear to stand at odds with the one of Turkey, which leads to a situation in which a regional competition of contrasting perspectives and interest is occurring. This only partly answers the first question, as significant differences exist on how the interests of all four states are formed.

**Egypt**
The research’s findings show that Egypt’s interest in the Eastern Mediterranean is significantly connected to domestic motivation in which the government is pursuing an agenda to transform Egypt into a modern state with a developed economy. The development of the country’s natural gas sector is considered to be of significant importance for Egypt’s overall economy. Within this context, Egypt is cooperating with both Israel and Cyprus. The relationship with Israel is performed tacitly on a political level although the Egyptian government views the cooperation between the private sectors on matters of natural gas as positive and beneficial for Egypt’s overall development.

With Cyprus, the relationship is far more developed as it concerns fields of economic and military cooperation along with a perceived cultural relation. Among these, natural gas is singled out by the Egyptian government as one of the most important aspects in the relationship. While the Egyptian government supports the Cypriot position on negotiations of the Cyprus problem, the significance of their relationship is largely materialized on maritime areas in which it recognizes Cypriot rights to explore for natural resources as well as the legitimacy existing EEZ agreements signed by Cyprus. Important to note is that the location of the Egyptian Zohr field is close to outer limits of its EEZ, which it delineated together with Cyprus. Therefore, the interest in advocating the legitimacy of the Cypriot-Egyptian EEZ agreement has as much to do with recognizing Cypriot rights, as it has to do with safeguarding its own natural gas resources.
Israel

Concerning Israel, its government perceives security challenges in form of terrorism and a perceived growing Iranian influence in the Middle East. Its relationship with Egypt is perceived as a strategic relationship and as a fundament for wider peace and stability in the Middle East. The gas deal is perceived to, apart from economic benefits, fit into a domestic motivation to increase security and good neighborly relations in the region. In Cyprus, Israel see a partner within the European Union with which is has a deeper relationship that is pursued on common notions of democratic values. The government perceives Israel and Cyprus, as the two existing democratic countries in the region to be natural partners, which adds a normative aspect to their relations. This natural relationship between the two states is often noted in context of historical bonds between the Cypriot and Jewish peoples. As such, this narrative points to a clear interest on the part of both the Cypriot and Israeli governments to bring in a historical context to the existing relations upon which the existing people-to-people’s relationship can be expanded exist between the countries.

Engagement in the Eastern Mediterranean together with Cyprus allows Israel to foster its relations with the “west” and, in a regional context, break free form political isolation. Existent in areas of energy, where they are pursuing the East Med pipeline as a common project, the relationship also includes dimensions of emergency planning and common visions on regional security. Israel openly supports Cyprus in its rights to utilize its maritime zones and explore for natural gas resources and insists on its independence in these matters.

The Republic of Cyprus

Concerning the Republic of Cyprus, its government perceives its engagement in the Eastern Mediterranean region as positioning Cyprus in the center of a changing geopolitical environment. Its regional engagement is underpinned by aims to establishing security and stability in cooperative frameworks with its regional partners, with whom it perceives to share cultural, historical bonds and common views on regional security and stability. It views natural gas as a facilitator of regional security and stability and to simultaneously benefit the overall development of the Cypriot economy, adding a domestic dimension to its interests.

Activities related to natural gas exploration and drilling within its EEZ is viewed as inherent sovereign rights. The government’s disinclination to suspend its activities within its EEZ or cooperate jointly with the TRNC further indicates a perception that it considers
maritime rights and natural resources to be the exclusive competences of the government as the *de jure* authority. Thus, it moves to ward any revenue until pending a reunification, arguing that the island’s resources belong to all Cypriots.

**Turkey**

Turkey’s engagement in the region is based upon premises that differ significantly from those of Israel, Egypt and especially Cyprus. The Turkish engagement in the Eastern Mediterranean appears to be conducted through two general approaches, one concerning its own national security, which connects to its domestic agenda in maintaining national unity and enhancing the independence of the Turkish state. The notion of a need for unity is, aside from being a contemporary aim, derived from Turkish history as argued by its political leadership. Such efforts materialize in form of claims on maritime areas southwest of Cyprus and in the Aegean based upon national interest.

The second approach in the Eastern Mediterranean is linked to the former, as displayed by the principle of Turkish policy *prosperity at home and abroad*. Its political and military support to the TRNC is conducted within a framework where Turkey views itself as a security guarantor and protector of the Turkish Cypriot rights along with a held cultural notion that Turkey is the “motherland” of the Turkish Cypriots. Natural gas is perceived by the Turkish government to be interlinked with the peace negotiations and it regards actions taken by Cypriot government as illegitimate and detrimental to the stability of the region. In this context, the Turkish government displays an interest in safeguarding the rights of the Turkish Cypriots on the island and in the Eastern Mediterranean by all necessary means, including the use of hard power.

**Summary of interests**

The different frameworks in which Cyprus, Egypt and Israel engaged are new and continue in their development. A possibility exists that they eventually will take form of more comprehensive security architecture. Today, these frameworks are at best alignments with an existent synergy on regional issues and interests. On the one hand, the Israeli-Cypriot cooperation in field of defense, should tensions rise between Turkey and Cyprus relating to natural gas, could be a potential element that lead to upheaval in the region. On the other hand, Given Turkey’s regional role and military capacity, it is unlikely that Israel would commit to defend Cypriot natural resources should such a situation arise. This is indicated by
the cooperative history between Israel and Turkey and Turkey as a potential destination of Israeli gas, as viewed by the Israeli government, should favorable political circumstances.

**Question II.**

Regarding the second question; “How can the respective approaches to natural gas resources, undertaken by Cyprus and Turkey, be conceptualized in terms of stability in the Eastern Mediterranean?” the research finds that the approaches of Cyprus and Turkey are largely based upon fundamentally different premises, in which each side perceives the other as the antagonist, in part as a result of the Cyprus problem on which they have significantly different views. Given the international recognition of the Republic of Cyprus, its government argues to possess sovereign rights over its maritime areas and natural resources. The legal status of the Republic of Cyprus, support from the international community and its regional partners as well as the presence of international companies in its EEZ, bolsters the Cypriot government’s arguments as well as its legitimacy vis a vis Turkey. However, Turkey views Cyprus’s present course as unacceptable by Turkey. It has a history of reciprocal actions in response to moves taken by Cyprus. Having utilized its Navy to successfully obstruct drillings in Cypriot waters, Turkey appears prepared to resort to any means necessary in order to protect the rights of the Turkish Cypriots, in which it holds that any consequences are solely on the shoulders of the Cypriot government. The research’s findings therefore indicate that the continuation of the current approaches maintained by both Cyprus and Turkey towards natural gas resources in the Eastern Mediterranean risk elevating tensions between the two states.

Based upon the findings above, I discard my hypothesis that actions taken by the Republic of Cyprus in the field of natural gas, being issuing licenses to companies and excluding the TRNC from this create more tensions in the region. 

While this hypothesis partly holds, the findings presented above suggest that the course of Cypriot actions within the field of natural gas does not alone account for heightened tensions. The risk of increased tensions is derived from both Cyprus and Turkey, in which a clash of perspectives is taking place among them. The policy of the Cypriot government in which it excludes TRNC, and rightly so in the context of sovereignty, together with the conscious policy pursued by the Turkish government to protect the rights of the Turkish Cypriots by all means, creates a situation in which they jointly contribute to an increased risk of heightened tensions between Cyprus, TRNC and Turkey.
Reflections on approaches to natural gas

Including the Turkish Cypriots in a cooperative framework on natural gas could most certainly have constituted a positive factor in terms of relations between the Republic of Cyprus, TRNC and Turkey. The Cypriot government would have had to allow the TRNC, an entity that it does not recognize, into taking part in pursuing what is regarded as the sovereign rights of the republic. It is likely that such a move would have carried significant political risk for the government, in terms of anti-sentiments among the Greek Cypriots and political opposition. After all, such cooperation would not ease all existing differences with Turkey, as its claims southwest of the island would remain, as would the Cyprus problem. Nevertheless, it would have allowed for the creation of a common platform upon which the Greek and Turkish Cypriots could have stood together, whilst at the same having removed one aspect of Turkish influence on the island and having lessened the risk of tensions between the Republic of Cyprus, TRNC and Turkey.
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