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Europe, Mediterranean and energy: a new devil's alternative?

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Resumen:

La energía es un pilar básico del desarrollo, y Europa sigue precisando una energía que, pese a los cambios de modelo que se están realizando, requerirá todavía durante algún tiempo de la llegada de hidrocarburos, especialmente gas, al territorio de la Unión.

La necesidad de esos recursos esenciales motiva que sea preciso adquirirlos pese a que con los beneficios por su extracción o tránsito a través de su territorio, se facilite que naciones con las que existen disputas crecientes financien los medios con los que intentar alcanzar sus objetivos.

La existencia de diferentes opciones para el suministro de hidrocarburos —especialmente gas— cada una de ellas con ventajas e inconvenientes, debería ser tomada de manera conjunta por la Unión Europea, y especialmente mirando hacia el sur del Mediterráneo, hacia África, si bien, ciertamente, y en cualquier caso, se trata de decidir sobre “alternativas del diablo”.

Palabras clave:

Europa, Unión Europea, Mediterráneo, energía, Rusia, Turquía, África.

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Europe, the Mediterranean and energy: a new devil's alternative?

Abstract:

Energy is a basic pillar of development, and Europe continues needing an energy that, despite the model changes that are being carried out, will still require for some time the arrival of hydrocarbons, especially gas, to the territory of the Union.

The need for these essential resources means that it is necessary to acquire them despite the fact that with the benefits of their extraction or transit through their territory, it is easier for nations with which there are growing disputes to finance the means with which they try to achieve their objectives.

The existence of different options for the supply of hydrocarbons -especially gas- each of them with advantages and disadvantages, should be taken jointly by the European Union, and especially looking towards the south of the Mediterranean, towards Africa, although, certainly, and in any case, it is about deciding on existence of 'devil's alternatives'.

Keywords:

Europe, European Union, Mediterranean, energy, Russia, Turkey, Africa

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Introduction: energy, the cornerstone

The importance of energy is a recurring element in any analysis of economic, social, political or military depth; access to energy sources has been one of the polemical causes of history, and the geopolitics of the 20th century is deeply intertwined with the geopolitics of energy, largely with oil and increasingly with gas, the two great hydrocarbons that have been the cornerstones of development –and of conflict– in the last century.

Indeed, energy poverty, a term coined in 2010, has a powerful impact on the lack of economic and social development; the poorest countries often have the worst energy services, which results in and contributes to malnutrition, living conditions below minimum health standards and limited access to education and employment¹. Without energy there is no development, and without adequate development, the existence of an adequate degree of stability is complex.

Access to energy is key, but this requires both the existence of the energy resource and its valorisation by getting it to its destination, the consumer. Transport infrastructure is therefore also critical.

With reference to hydrocarbons, which is the subject of this paper –and without wishing to make an in-depth analysis, but rather a reflection on the subject– oil and gas pipelines, the infrastructures for transporting them, are critical not only due to their importance, but also because, under certain conditions, they are very easily attacked: hundreds of kilometres of pipelines are a very tempting target for attack by any group, without requiring a high degree of specialisation for such a hostile act: And so are the pumping control and management centres of these infrastructures, and by very different means, including, and increasingly so, the possibility of cyber-attacks, as recently occurred on an oil pipeline located on US soil² –which transports 45% of the fuel on the east coast of the country–,

¹ HABITAT.ORG, Energy poverty: effects on development, society and environment. Available at <https://www.habitat.org/emea/about/what-we-do/residential-energy-efficiency-households/energy-poverty>

NOTE: All web links in this document are active as of 25 May 2021.

² ABC, Ciberataque atribuido a hackers rusos deja sin combustible a buena parte del este de EEUU, 11 May 2021. Available at https://www.abc.es/internacional/abci-ciberataque-atribuido-hackers-rusos-deja-sin-combustible-buena-parte-este-eeuu-202105101921_noticia.html

an act which has apparently led to the payment of a ransom³ in order to restore the flow of hydrocarbons to normal.

With increasing environmental and climate change awareness, the aim of achieving zero carbon emissions requires a change in the energy model, especially the abandonment in the first instance of the most polluting energies –such as coal– and their replacement by “green” energies, especially renewables; but it is not a simple process, nor is it free of difficulties. And while the shift away from hydrocarbons is taking place gradually, gas has a vital role to play in the energy transition⁴, as –with its lights and shadows– natural gas can accelerate the shift away from biomass and coal, natural gas seems to be shaping up, to some extent, as the transition fuel.

Renewables are gradually gaining weight in the power generation conglomerate, but in many cases on the basis of large subsidies –which generates major disputes and cross accusations about the real cost of such energy– and still without real capacity to fully meet demand, as well as existing doubts regarding the ability to adequately meet the large peaks in energy requirements that occur at certain times. And this dispute also includes nuclear energy, which has its great detractors and great defenders, both for the potential danger of facilities and waste, the former, and for the non-emission of CO₂ and the capacity to immediately meet demand peaks, the latter, among many other arguments on both sides.

And beyond the hydrocarbons versus renewables narrative –in addition to the existing nuclear energy narrative– and without going into this aspect in depth, I would simply point out that some of the technology related to alternative energies may generate dependence on certain materials and resources, such as lithium, which could imply that

³ CINCO DÍAS, Colonial pagó un rescate de 4,13 millones de euros a los hackers que sabotearon su oleoducto, 14 May 2021. Available at https://cincodias.elpais.com/cincodias/2021/05/14/companias/1620977479_241828.html

⁴ ROCA, José A., El gas natural tiene un papel vital en la transición energética, El periódico de la energía, 2 March 2021. Available at <https://elperiodicodelaenergia.com/el-gas-natural-tiene-un-papel-vital-en-la-transicion-energetica/>

geopolitical disputes and differences would not disappear by leaving hydrocarbons behind, but would simply shift⁵ towards other elements and aspects.

Energy –its procurement, storage, distribution, etc.– is a cornerstone for the development and sustainability of any society. It is therefore too a major geopolitical element, but is it also so for Europe?

Europe, European Union?

During the 20th century Europe has been deficient in energy, especially hydrocarbons, of which deposits and reserves have only been found in the North Sea. Dependence on the flow of oil and attempts to secure –or control– that flow articulated an important part of Cold War geopolitics.

The European Union was not only born with the vocation of being a “common market”, an economic framework, a process of purely economic integration, but it intends, or intended, to go beyond that stage and move towards a process of growing political integration that would allow it to have a single voice and vision in many aspects, including, of course, the essential ones, those that constitute the pillars of security; and energy is undoubtedly one of them. Therefore, it is argued that if attempts to move forward and make progress on this vision of the Union fail, Europe would be committing suicide⁶ a third time.

Despite energy dependence, Europe's quest for “strategic autonomy”, the ability to be a full international actor, has one of its main stumbling blocks in a situation that, in an article entitled “Illusions of Autonomy”, is referred to as “strategic cacophony”⁷, the lack of a single strategic voice, and vision. It is this single strategic vision that would really make it possible to plan, design and implement medium- and long-term projects, against which

⁵ In this sense PARDO, Pablo, La geopolítica de las renovables: los amos del litio sustituyen a los señores del petróleo, *El Mundo*, 27 April 2021, Available at <https://www.elmundo.es/ciencia-y-salud/medio-ambiente/2021/04/27/6086ffc421efa0fb7f8b4626.html>.

⁶ PIQUÉ, Josep, Evitar el tercer suicidio de Europa, *Política Exterior*, 15 April 2021. Available at <https://www.politicaexterior.com/evitar-el-tercer-suicidio-de-europa/>

⁷ MEIJER, Hugo and BROOKS, Stephen G., Illusions of autonomy, *International Security*, volume 45, issue 4, Spring 2021, pp. 7-43, page 9. Available at https://www.belfercenter.org/sites/default/files/files/publication/Meijer_Brooks%20isec_a_00405.pdf

there is serious divergence on key issues and matters that affect Europe's development, life and very security.

In relation to the energy aspect, and again using a few brief examples, Germany, with a large industrial conglomerate around coal –in fact, billions of euros in aid are planned for the areas affected by the reduction or cessation of activity– has set itself the objective of ceasing to produce energy from thermal power stations using this fuel by 2038⁸. And it has decided to close all its nuclear power plants by 2022 –in 2020 they produced 11.4% of the country's energy⁹–, while different European nations are closing their nuclear power plants, others have never had such facilities on their soil –which does not imply that they have not consumed, via interconnections, energy from such sources– and others are not only not giving up but are building more nuclear reactors. As the champion of nuclear energy production in Europe, France, although it had initially indicated in 2014 that it intended to reduce from 75% to 50% the energy generated on its soil by nuclear means¹⁰, has in any case recently indicated that it will not dispense with nuclear energy¹¹.

And it is not only this “strategic cacophony” that is evident in these questions: when it comes to addressing a European strategy towards China, faced with the expansion of the second global economic power that is gradually extending its presence and influence across the planet, or with the strengthening or not of the transatlantic link, the perception felt is sometimes defined as “kaleidoscopic dynamics”¹² regarding relations between the Union, the United States and China; and while the United States has returned to the classic grand strategy towards China, the European Union, in an effort to define its own

⁸ GESLEY, Jenny, Germany: law on phasing-out coal-powered energy by 2038 enters into force, Library of Congress, 31 August 2020. Available at <https://www.loc.gov/law/foreign-news/article/germany-law-on-phasing-out-coal-powered-energy-by-2038-enters-into-force/#:~:text=The%20Coal%20Phase%20Out%20Act,start%20operating%20after%20August%2014%20C>

⁹ APPUN, Kerstine, The history behind Germany's nuclear phase-out, 9 March 2021. Available at [https://www.cleanenergywire.org/factsheets/history-behind-germanys-nuclear-phase-out#:~:text=However%2C%20in%20the%20wake%20of,the%20Bundestag%20\(federal%20parliament\)](https://www.cleanenergywire.org/factsheets/history-behind-germanys-nuclear-phase-out#:~:text=However%2C%20in%20the%20wake%20of,the%20Bundestag%20(federal%20parliament)).

¹⁰ WORLD NUCLEAR NEWS, New French energy policy to limit nuclear, 18 June 2014. Available at <https://www.world-nuclear-news.org/NP-New-French-energy-policy-to-limit-nuclear-1806144.html>

¹¹ ALVES, José, Macrón, a contracorriente: las renovables nunca sustituirán a las nucleares en Francia, CapitalMadrid, 6 May 2021. Available at <https://www.capitalmadrid.com/2021/5/6/59486/macron-a-contracorriente-las-renovables-nunca-sustituiran-a-las-nucleares-en-francia.html>

¹² TOOZE, Adam, La fragilidad de la estrategia europea frente a China, Política Exterior, 15 April 2021. Available at <https://www.politicaexterior.com/la-fragilidad-de-la-estrategia-europea-hacia-china/>

strategy towards Beijing, has defined China simultaneously as a cooperation partner, an economic competitor and a systemic rival.

If it is not feasible to unify criteria for the production and use of energy (of any kind) in the Union, if it is not possible to unify criteria on external relations in this world in full reconfiguration... will we be in a position to use the capacity to purchase energy flows – especially gas– as a geopolitical tool or will we be at the mercy of the supplier?

The East: Security of supply vs growing rivalry?

Europe, or a significant part of it, is heavily dependent on Russian gas, with around 40% of the gas consumed in Europe coming from Russia¹³. Part of it, in a direct link, through Nordstream I, which runs along the bottom of the Baltic, bypassing Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia, a transport infrastructure built in 2011 and whose aim was and is to avoid and obviate the payment of rights of passage to nations not aligned with Moscow; and another part, more than half of this total, although coming from Russia, enters European soil¹⁴ via Belarus and, above all, Ukraine.

The “Yamal” infrastructure crosses Belarus and Poland and reaches as far as Germany, but Ukraine is the real pipeline hub of the former Soviet Union, hosting not only a branch of the Yamal but also two other lines –“Soyuz” and “Druzkha”– through which hydrocarbons from Siberia and Central Asia flow.

Russia, like the former Soviet Union, is a reliable supplier –most of its exports are energy products, and Europe has been and is a good customer– and they have never stopped pumping gas to Europe, to Germany via the Yamal pipeline from Siberia via Ukraine. In fact, the only supply disruption occurred during the so-called “gas wars” in 2005-2006 and 2008-2009, when disputes between Ukraine and Russia escalated and Kiev extracted more gas than its allocated quota, resulting in less gas reaching Europe.

¹³ FISHMAN, Edward, Sanctions won't stop Nord Stream 2. Diplomacy Will, Foreign Policy, 9 April 2021. Available at https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/04/09/sanctions-wont-stop-nord-stream-2-diplomacy-will/?utm_source=PostUp&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign%E2%80%A6

¹⁴ EUROPEAN COMMISSION, Energy Data, Eurostat. Available at <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/energy/data>

The growing dispute with Ukraine not only generated the so-called “gas wars”, but since Kiev’s apparent orientation towards the West –with the collateral effects of Russia’s annexation of Crimea and the Donbass conflict in 2014– the relationship between the two nations is very complex; and Moscow does not want much of its ability to market one of its main sources of wealth, the sale of hydrocarbons, to benefit, by paying transit fees, its recent rival; even in the European desire to move to hydrogen as one of the alternative energy sources, Ukraine would continue to be, if it could not be bypassed, a point of forced passage thereof, so that billions of euros would continue to flow into Kiev’s coffers. And this issue is of utmost importance for both Russians and Ukrainians¹⁵, the former trying to avoid it and the latter to maintain it.

In order not to depend on any country in its immediate neighbourhood as a transit point for its energy transport infrastructures, the so-called “Nord Stream 2”¹⁶ is being built between Russia and Germany, which began in 2018 and will double the transport capacity between Russia and Germany. Opinions are divided on the subject, because while some see it as a necessary energy stability for Europe, others see it as a surrender to Russia –for example, US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken expressly stated that this new project “(...) is a Russian geopolitical project aimed at dividing Europe and weakening its energy security”¹⁷, and that it is a bad deal for Germany, for Ukraine and for its allies and partners in Central and Eastern Europe.

It is also pointed out that the impediments to the development of Nordstream 2 go against the capacity of the energy transition, especially for Germany¹⁸, as the closure of nuclear and coal plants implies the need to look for a viable, short-term alternative to avoid a lack of power generation. And in the face of this reasoning, Washington has been pressing for some time¹⁹ for Europe to buy liquefied natural gas (LNG), because since the exponential

¹⁵ PROKIP, Andrian, A new era of gas wars between Ukraine and Russia, Wilson Center, 23 November 2020. Available at <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/new-era-gas-wars-between-ukraine-and-russia>

¹⁶ Official website <https://www.nord-stream2.com/>

¹⁷ US DEPARTMENT OF STATE, Nord Stream 2 and potential sanctionable activity, Press Statement, 18 March 2021. Available at <https://www.state.gov/nord-stream-2-and-potential-sanctionable-activity/>

¹⁸ G. GROSS, Stephen, Want a green future? Let Nord Stream go, Foreign Policy, 6 May 2021. Available at <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/05/06/nord-stream-biden-united-states-germany-russia-europe-energy-carbon-renewables-climate-diplomacy/>

¹⁹ AA ENERGY, US LNG price up to 40% higher than Russian gas: Novak, 27 May 2018 <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/energy/energy-diplomacy/us-lng-price-up-to-40-higher-than-russian-gas-novak/20225>

development of fracking in its territory, the United States has once again become a net exporter of it; arguments about price volatility, security and regularity in the flow of supply and other aspects, while important, do not fail to hide a geopolitical reality, such as the (mutual) dependence of the receiving country on the issuing country, in this case the United States or Russia. And in the context of the growing dispute between the two powers, this aspect is by no means trivial.

And it is neither for one nation nor for the Union as a whole; in the context of a complex and weakened transatlantic link, a link that is apparently being restored to some extent, threats of sanctions by the United States against the companies building the pipeline – already 95% completed– are serious warnings.

Russia has long sought to bypass the transit of its hydrocarbon wealth through unfriendly nations, and one such attempt to bypass Ukraine was the “Southstream” project²⁰, which from Russian soil and across the Black Sea would provide a crossing point for energy flows to Europe via Bulgaria; but a combination of factors –from sanctions against Moscow over the annexation of Ukraine to the cost of the project and geopolitical issues such as not contributing to increased Russian influence in the Balkans– led in 2014 to Putin's eventual scrapping of the project.

It is also trying to avoid being circumvented, or bypassed, and losing the source of wealth –and power– that comes from having the Union as a client; and so, in its quest for open oceanic waters and to regain some of the sphere of influence of the past, it has been taking steps in this direction, southwards and towards the Mediterranean basin. Interventions over the last decade in hydrocarbon-rich Syria and Libya, as well as the strong relationship with Algeria –the other major producer in North Africa– are some of the aspects that put this eagerness and intentions in black and white.

In addition to other geopolitical considerations, the control of energy flows to Europe – their control or fragmentation– is one of the crown jewels of a world in full reconfiguration; and this control of energy flows not only has an economic- and powerful– aspect, but also

²⁰ HYDROCARBONS TECHNOLOGY, South Stream Pipeline Project, Europe. Available at <https://www.hydrocarbons-technology.com/projects/southstream/>

an equally or more powerful geopolitical one²¹, related to the capacity to influence and intervene in the internal affairs of other nations or coalitions, either directly or through companies and corporations.

That disputes with Moscow are growing is no secret, as the daily headlines show: from the mutual withdrawal of diplomats and accusations of Moscow's interference in Europe²² to the EU summit²³ in May 2021, with mutual relations at their lowest level in a long time and Brussels revising its threat perception, the situation is getting more and more complicated by the day.

Therefore, and looking at just one of the potential routes for energy resources via pipelines, is it appropriate to provide arguments –to stop buying energy products from Moscow– to encourage this rivalry? Or is it possible to maintain demand –and the associated revenues for Moscow– in return for a greater rapprochement with the Union?

There are also other alternatives and other avenues. And these also require decisions.

The Southeast: Alternative path vs new expansive power?

Turkey's position as a land bridge between Asia, Africa and Europe is, or could be, crucial for the arrival of energy flows –via oil and gas pipelines– to Europe.

Not only is energy-dependent Turkey looking for ways to increase its capacity for self-sufficiency and lower the cost of hydrocarbon purchases, but also Russia needs alternative crossing points to Ukraine, Belarus and the Baltic states –the nations that lie like a belt between Russia and the rest of Europe– in order to reduce dependence on them in the face of the path that does not coincide with Moscow's vision adopted by some of these nations and to continue selling hydrocarbons to Europe. And Turkey occupies a

²¹ In this regard MACKINNON, Amy, Putin's shadow warriors stake claim to Syria's oil, Foreign Policy, 17 May 2021. Available at <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/05/17/putin-shadow-warriors-stake-claim-syria-oil-energy-wagner-prigozhin-libya-middle-east/>

²² LA VANGUARDIA, Espías, sobornos, asesinatos y corrupción: a que se enfrenta la UE con la injerencia rusa, 12 May 2021. Available at <https://www.lavanguardia.com/internacional/20210512/7443783/espias-sobornos-asesinatos-corrupcion-ue-injerencia-rusa.html>

²³ EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, Outlook for the special European Council meeting of 24-25 May 2021, 21 May 2021. Available at https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=EPRS_BRI%282021%29662639

central position in a key space on the planet, in that ring of land²⁴ that encircles the immense landmass - one sixth of Russia's emerged lands.

On the other hand, from the Central Asian and South Caucasus fields, Soviet options involved sending the fuel through the radial system and, once inland, Moscow channelled it to Europe or wherever it deemed appropriate. But after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the former republics, although still under the aegis of the Kremlin, are trying other alternatives for the disposal of their hydrocarbons; and the overland route that does not go through Russia to Europe passes through the South Caucasus and Turkey. Even Iran is considering the possibility of joining these flows and along these routes; and so names such as Nabuco (Persian infrastructure), South Caucasus, Tabriz (Iranian city) - Ankara (Turkish city) gas pipeline²⁵, Trans Caspian, TANAP (Trans ANAtolian Pipeline)²⁶... infrastructures in different degrees of development, as realities or as projects, are appearing. And the common denominator of all of them is that Turkey is a land bridge to Europe, meaning that the rights of passage and the energy flows involved constitute sufficient reasons for Ankara to activate the necessary geopolitical and political resources to achieve its purposes.

Consequently, Turkey finds itself in a position of advantage that it seeks to exploit; and so much so that the centuries-old rivalry with Moscow –it is worth remembering that it was largely the Russian empire that, after more than a dozen wars, put an end to the Ottoman Empire's presence in Europe– has been transformed into a sort of “entente”, albeit not without dysfunctions and differences. And while Russia is cancelling the Southstream, Turkey is bidding for a new pipeline, called “Turkish Stream”²⁷, to run along the bottom of the Black Sea and link the Russian and Turkish coasts, thus creating a direct entry point for gas to the Balkans and from there to the rest of Europe.

²⁴ SÁNCHEZ HERRÁEZ, Pedro, Siglo XXI: ¿el retorno a la lucha por el Rimland?, Analysis Paper 12/2021, Spanish Institute for Strategic Studies, 17 March 2021. Available at http://www.ieeee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_analisis/2021/DIEEEA12_2021_PEDSAN_Rimland.pdf

²⁵ GLOBAL ENERGY MONITOR, Tabriz-Ankara Pipeline. Available at https://www.gem.wiki/Tabriz-Ankara_Pipeline

²⁶ TANAP, Trans Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline Project. Available at <https://www.tanap.com/tanap-project/why-tanap/>

²⁷ A collection of articles and opinions on Turkish Stream can be found in EURACTIV, About: Turkish Stream. Available at <https://www.euractiv.com/topics/turkish-stream/>

Ankara not only confirms itself as an alternative hydrocarbon route used by Russia, but the Turkish nation, after abandoning the policy of “zero problems”²⁸ with neighbouring countries, has embarked on a neo-Ottoman vision, on the recovery of the space or influence that the Sublime Porte once had over vast spaces on three continents; and for this it employs from the civic geopolitics²⁹ –related to ties and links with peoples and territories of the former Ottoman Empire, as well as a Caliphate narrative– to the concept of strategic depth³⁰, the Turkish vision of being the axis and centre of an immense territory with a foot and reach on three continents.

Through a very proactive policy, Ankara not only intervened in the Syrian war, in the recent Nagorno-Karabakh conflict –in the South Caucasus– but has also been the key player in tipping the balance in the Libyan war by unilaterally and illegally expanding – and encouraging and getting Libya to do the same– its exclusive economic zone, which would cut in two the eastern Mediterranean³¹, an area with important hydrocarbon deposits, thus hindering the potential laying of a gas pipeline (“Eastmed”³²) between the eastern Mediterranean fields and Greece and Italy. In this way, Ankara aims to maintain control and be a major player in the region.

In order to achieve its objectives, it does not hesitate to directly confront itself and others: despite being a member of NATO, it has had no problem in acquiring anti-aircraft and anti-missile systems from Russia³³ –with the resulting loss of confidence and security that this entails– in targeting with its weapons a French warship³⁴ that was carrying out a

²⁸ SATANAKIS, Sofia Maria and SÜSS, Katrin, The shift in Turkey's foreign policy, AIES, Focus 3/2021. Available at <https://www.aies.at/download/2021/AIES-Fokus-2021-03.pdf>

²⁹ ÖNIS, Ziya, Turkey and the Arab revolutions: boundaries of regional power influence in a turbulent Middle East, Mediterranean Politics, volume 19 issue 2, 2014, page 206. Available at https://www.researchgate.net/publication/263703954_Turkey_and_the_Arab_Revolutions_Boundaries_of_Regional_Power_Influence_in_a_Turbulent_Middle_East/link/56bb1d2a08ae6d700a68f32a/download

³⁰ THE JERUSALEM POST, Turkey's new “Strategic Depth”, 4 September 2012. Available at <https://www.jpost.com/opinion/op-ed-contributors/turkeys-new-strategic-depth>

³¹ FRANTZMAN, Seth, Turkey is trying to take over the Mediterranean, Middle East Forum, 3 December 2019. Available at https://www.meforum.org/60023/turkey-is-trying-to-take-over-the-mediterranean?utm_sou

³² GLOBAL ENERGY MONITOR, East Med Gas Pipeline. Available at https://www.gem.wiki/East_Med_Gas_Pipeline

³³ WORLD POLITICS REVIEW, Why there is no easy solution to the US Turkey dispute over the S-400, 29 December 2020. Available at <https://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/29319/for-nato-turkey-s-400-crisis-has-no-easy-solutions>

³⁴ REUTERS, France-Turkey tensions mount after NATO naval incident, 7 July 2020. Available at <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-nato-france-turkey-analysis-idUSKBN2481K5>

mission ordered by the International Community, in colliding –physically– with Greek warships³⁵ or it is even suggested that, despite the international conventions signed, it could be secretly developing a nuclear weapons programme³⁶. So much so that it is noted that these actions have contributed to turning the eastern Mediterranean into the centre of a geopolitical storm³⁷, and the international community is employing mechanisms to de-escalate the situation, although the red line may lie with Turkish neo-Ottoman interests.

Does it seem appropriate, therefore, in the context of a powerful expansionary drive... to provide arguments –to stop purchasing energy products received via Turkey– to encourage such expansion? Or is it possible to maintain demand –and the associated revenues for Ankara– in return for pursuing less expansionary policies?

And there is another alternative and another way. And this also requires decisions.

The South: Complex supply vs stabilisation and development?

Africa is a continent full of riches, which is increasingly populated and, in certain areas, such as the Sahelian region –among others– increasingly insecure and unstable.

The need to combat terrorism –one of its greatest scourges, which acts as a trigger for many of the existing differences– as well as other forms of insecurity, requires a holistic approach, comprehensive strategies that, across the entire spectrum of the stabilisation cycle (security-governance-economic and social development), allow the combination of an improvement in these aspects –and although security is the basis and the primary element, stabilisation requires the other pillars to be real and sustainable– to chart the path of societies and countries towards a substantial improvement in the situation.

³⁵ REUTERS, Greek, Turkish warships in “mini collision” Ankara calls provocative, 14 August 2020. Available at <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-greece-turkey-warships-idUSKCN25A161>

³⁶ J., Jacob, Is Turkey running a secret nuclear weapons program with the help of Pakistan, International Business Times, 3 January 2021. Available at <https://www.ibtimes.sg/turkey-running-secret-nuclear-weapons-program-help-pakistan-54609>

³⁷ TANCHUM, Michaël, How did the Mediterranean become the eye of a geopolitical storm?, Foreign Policy, 18 August 2020. Available at <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/08/18/eastern-mediterranean-greece-turkey-warship-geopolitical-showdown/>

In order to facilitate such stabilisation, the possibility of accessing energy sources makes it possible and undoubtedly favours development capacities, both from local options and external investment. The existence of an abundant labour force –the best demographic dividend on the planet³⁸, i.e. the ratio of people of working age to the total population, is Africa as a whole– provides many opportunities for investment and development, as there is an abundance of one of the factors of production.

In addition, it should be noted that urban growth is accelerating³⁹; and African cities, in this uncontrolled growth, require an increasing amount of energy. And the supply of an adequate amount of energy at reasonable prices has always been, throughout history, one of the drivers of development; therefore, an adequate flow of hydrocarbons – because, again, the options of using exclusively green energy and self-sufficiency, although desirable conditions, can be considered in the continent, at least in the medium term horizon– can serve as an element that contributes, in an adequate proportion, to the stabilisation and more orderly development of urban areas, in turn reducing conflict and possibilities of disturbances⁴⁰.

In the attempt to meet this demand, coal, one of the most polluting and least clean options available, is included at the local level in an energy transition environment and on a continent, especially in the Mediterranean and Sahelian area, deeply affected by climate change. And Africa extracts increasing amounts of coal⁴¹ to meet its needs; indeed, the

³⁸ MORA TEBAS, Juan A., Sahel: un tsunami humano... ¿reversible?, Analysis Paper 03/2018, Spanish Institute for Strategic Studies, 17 January 2018. Available at http://www.ieeee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_analisis/2018/DIEEEA03-2018_Sahel-Tsunami_demografico_reversible_JAMT.pdf

³⁹ SÁNCHEZ HERRÁEZ, Pedro; África en la “era urbana”: hacia el desarrollo o al desorden?, Analysis Paper 14/2019, Spanish Institute for Strategic Studies, 24 April 2019. Available at http://www.ieeee.es/en/Galerias/fichero/docs_analisis/2019/DIEEEA14_2019PEDSAN-ciudadesAfrica.pdf

⁴⁰ It is enough to think how the perennial lack of electricity supply in Lebanon, a country that years ago was called the “Switzerland of the East”, is a cause of social grievance and permanent unrest and which, fed by other problems and social disputes, generates real revolts; the lack of energy as a significant element in the Lebanese crisis is included in THE DAILY STAR, Lebanon’s economic collapse in numbers, 17 March 2021. Available at <https://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2021/Mar-17/518513-lebanons-economic-collapse-in-numbers.ashx>; and the threat of a total energy collapse is noted in LA PRESSE, Le Liban risque de être plongé dans le “noir total”, avertit un ministre, 15 May 2021. Available at <https://www.lapresse.ca/international/moyen-orient/2021-03-11/le-liban-risque-d-etre-plonge-dans-le-noir-total-avertit-un-ministre.php>

⁴¹ DWI, Africa digs for coal to meet energy demands amid climate concerns, 2 April 2021. Available at <https://www.dw.com/en/africa-digs-for-coal-to-meet-energy-demands-amid-climate-concerns/a-57086116>

Africa Energy Chamber⁴², the umbrella organisation for most of the continent's private energy companies, is calling for more investment⁴³, to achieve greater efficiency.

However, hydrocarbons flow from the southern Mediterranean from various infrastructures to Europe via the Mare Nostrum: from Algeria to Spain –and a branch from Algeria to Morocco also continues to Spain– as well as another from Libya to Italy. And deposits and reserves are growing on the continent, in the Sahel and in sub-Saharan Africa, where, for example, the Gulf of Guinea is rich in hydrocarbons; and the recent creation of the AfCTA (African Continental Free Trade Area), of the “African common market”, despite the existing difficulties, increases the economic possibilities, and increases the chances of certain projects being carried out, such as the trans-Saharan gas pipeline⁴⁴, which would link the Gulf of Guinea with the Mediterranean, multiplying the capacity of the flow of hydrocarbons through a large part of the continent and towards Europe. The proportion of hydrocarbon flows received in the Union from the southern Mediterranean, both from North Africa and from other regions, could therefore increase, although the complexity and insecurity are undoubtedly greater than in other regions.

On the other hand, it would also be appropriate to gradually increase the meshing in the most populated and economically active areas of the continent, in order to extend the reach of the distribution network to other areas. The benefits gained would allow a boost to the stabilisation cycle, provided that the security and governance pillars are also acted upon. And the realisation that the benefits are passed on to society as a whole would be a spur to fairer and more stable societies; and, as a by-product, more secure ones, which would result in easier distribution and lower energy costs, motivating the cycle to turn in the right direction.

There is already strong investment in the continent and the region; in contrast to the relative withdrawal of the United States a few years ago, the action of new actors and

⁴² Official website <https://energychamber.org/>

⁴³ AFRICAN ENERGY CHAMBER, African Energy Chamber calls for more US-Africa energy investments with series about unjustified risk perceptions on Africa, 11 May 2021. Available at <https://energychamber.org/2021/05/11/african-energy-chamber-calls-for-more-us-africa-energy-investments-with-series-about-unjustified-risk-perceptions-on-africa/>

⁴⁴ AFRICAN ENERGY CHAMBER, African Energy Outlook, 2020, page 15.

powers, such as Russia and China, is growing⁴⁵, the latter largely focused on the construction of infrastructure of all kinds, which, in addition to the logical benefits of return on investment, allows Beijing's level of influence in these nations to be greatly increased. This, along with other issues, generates a narrative whose most immediate effect is the rise of autocracies on the continent and globally; and that national and regional infrastructures are literally in the hands of a major foreign power presents a potential risk⁴⁶ for these countries and the region as a whole, especially considering that the large Chinese companies involved in these critical infrastructure activities –in their construction, development, management, etc.– are wholly or largely state-owned, and largely opaque to international scrutiny.

In response, the EU points to the need to address the challenges of poverty, poor governance, access to basic services, etc., as well as the need to promote economic and social development, investment and job creation, especially for young people⁴⁷. A secure, stable and just environment is an imperative for development and prosperity, and there is a determination to increase support in the Sahel region, where the scale of the crisis and its humanitarian consequences imply the need for responses based on a comprehensive approach linking both the short and long term⁴⁸. Strategies, as well as being comprehensive, need to look at the long term. Otherwise, they are not strategies. But it is also necessary to carry out investments and projects that are profitable, that are sustainable, and that allow the societies of the continent, of the area, to really take off. Thus, as opposed to the policy of "blank cheques", it is necessary to set defined, decisive

⁴⁵ SÁNCHEZ HERRÁEZ, Pedro, Los "nuevos" actores en el Sahel, in VVAA, *El Sahel y G5: desafíos y oportunidades*, Cuaderno de Estrategia 202, Spanish Institute for Strategic Studies, Madrid, 2019, pp. 183-234. Available at

http://www.iecee.es/Galerias/fichero/cuadernos/CE_202_El_sahel_y_g5_desafios_y_oportunidades.pdf;

SÁNCHEZ HERRÁEZ, Pedro, *El Mediterráneo: ¿nueva zona en liza en la disputa global?* in VVAA, *El Mediterráneo*, Strategy Paper 209, Spanish Institute for Strategic Studies, Madrid, 2021 (forthcoming).

⁴⁶ DE MAIZIÈRE, Thomas and WESS MITCHELL, A., NATO needs to deal with China head-on, *Foreign Policy*, 23 February 2021. Available at: https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/02/23/nato-china-brussels-summit-biden-europe-alliance/?utm_source=PostUp&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=30550&utm_term=Editors%20Picks%20OC&?tpcc=30550

⁴⁷ EUROPEAN COUNCIL, Joint declaration of the members of the European Council with the Member States of the G5 Sahel, 28 April 2020, paragraph 14. Available at <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2020/04/28/joint-declaration-of-the-members-of-the-european-council-with-the-member-states-of-the-g5-sahel/>

⁴⁸ EUROPEAN COUNCIL, Joint declaration of the members of the European Council with the Member States of the G5 Sahel, 28 April 2020, paragraph 4. Available at <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2020/04/28/joint-declaration-of-the-members-of-the-european-council-with-the-member-states-of-the-g5-sahel/>

and achievable objectives, objectives that make it possible to measure progress in terms of the degree of compliance with the selected programmes and the improvement that they represent for the populations and nations where they are developed. And this must not only be done out of altruism –albeit a necessary and important condition– because, as EU High Representative for Foreign Policy Borrell⁴⁹ points out, “the security of the continent does not begin on the shores of the Mediterranean, but 4,700 kilometres away”, and “verifiable performance targets” must be set. Investment, despite the risks involved, should not be understood as a “sunk cost”.

In fact, and recently, in relation to the EU Strategy for the Sahel⁵⁰, the need was cited to address several of these structural challenges with a local, national, regional and international response, and with a long-term commitment; and that such a privileged relationship between the EU and the Sahel offers mutual strategic opportunities, and that the populations of the EU and of a stable Sahel can benefit, in a “win-win” logic, from the economic opportunities that are generated.

Is it therefore appropriate, in the context of the urgent need to stabilise and develop southern Europe, to take on more complexity in supply? Or is it possible to maintain and increase demand –and the associated revenues for the region and the continent– in return for a reduction in the risks and threats that will increasingly reach Europe from the southern Mediterranean?

And there may be, in addition to the above, other alternatives and other avenues... but they also require decisions. Or do they?

In order to reflect: Deciding?

A construction process requires, among many other things, decision-making. Sometimes, the options on which these decisions have to be made are not, and need not be, one

⁴⁹ LE MONDE, Josep Borrell, “Au Sahel nous avons peut-être signé trop de chèques en blanc”, 28 April 2021. Available at https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2021/04/28/josep-borrell-au-sahel-nous-avons-peut-etre-signe-trop-de-cheques-en-blanc_6078353_3212.html

⁵⁰ CONSEIL DE L'UNION EUROPÉENNE, Stratégie intégrée de l'Union Européenne au Sahel, Conclusions du Conseil, 16 April 2021. Available at <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/49278/st-7723-2021-init.pdf>

hundred percent mutually exclusive; but for a common project, decision-making is essential to achieve that common good. And security decisions, security in the full sense, are always important, they are cornerstones on which decisions have to be taken.

Any decision has pros and cons, advantages and disadvantages, elements of strength and vulnerabilities. That is why there are the “devil's alternatives”, the choices in which no option is fully satisfactory, and why deciding is difficult, why it is sometimes, and apparently, easier to not decide... even if that omission of the need to decide constitutes, in itself, a decision. And when there is a vacuum, something or someone will always fill it, and they will do so in their own self-interest, not for the common good of the shared project.

Nobody said it would be easy. It never is. The pandemic –which we are still going through– has revealed many things, including structural weaknesses and vulnerabilities in the Union. Maybe it's time to do something, to do something else.

Perhaps now is the time to commit to a vision for the future, rather than on immediacy. The benefits –and, above all, the reduction of enormous future risks, the beginnings of which we are beginning to feel– could be very advantageous.

Or maybe it is still time to do nothing, wish that no one else does anything, and hope that the wish will come true. And let's see if this time it comes true. Let's see...

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