

How Israeli Natural Gas May Help Solve The Cyprus Problem

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WASHINGTON – The perennially stalled negotiations between Turkish and Greek Cypriots about the future of the *de facto* divided Island may get new impetus from an unexpected “ally”. The indirect cause of this possible new development is the new geopolitical environment created by vast reserves of Israeli natural gas.

Israeli gas to Turkey

Indeed, abundant, off-shore Israeli natural gas is likely to soften recent Turkish-Israeli political and ideological animosities for the simple reason that Turkey would really like to increase and at the same time diversify its natural gas imports, now totally dependent on Iran and Russia. This Israeli natural gas, (developed in part by Noble Energy, a US company), would help economically troubled Turkey. But any gas pipeline to Turkey would have to go through Greek-Cypriot waters. Hence the added incentive to find ways to come to a deal that will resolve the dispute between Greeks and Turks in Cyprus that began way back in 1974 when Turkey, (fearing for the fate of its brethren in Northern Cyprus), invaded the northern part of the island, this way displacing tens of thousands of Greek Cypriots.

Incentive for finding a solution for Cyprus

Well, while the old animosities and suspicions still linger, Turkey has now a stronger interest in resolving this issue. And not just Turkey. The Greek Cypriots see the added value of becoming a transit route for precious Israeli natural gas.

And, last but not least there are hopes to find additional gas in the waters of Cyprus.

Self-interest also in the interest of a settlement?

Assuming a best case scenario, all players have now a renewed interest in accommodation. Turkey needs Israeli gas, and so it needs a deal with the Greek Cypriots. The Greek Cypriots see the advantages of their strategic geographic position as a transit point for Israeli gas exports to Turkey. Both Greek and Turkish Cypriots would benefit from additional natural gas discoveries around the island.

Well, assuming rational behavior, it would appear that –for a change– the discovery and exploitation of important natural resources in a troubled region may help towards the resolution of old conflicts in another.

Usually it works exactly the other way around.