

# Deciphering France's Mediterranean and Foreign Policy against Turkey

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**ABSTRACT** *France's Mediterranean policy can be analyzed from a historical perspective and through the actual conjuncture related to its geopolitical and geo-cultural elements, such as the West-East civilization dilemma and colonization background. Although these two elements are complementary to each other, they intersect with the political and economic interests of the Turkish state in the region. France's policy has become intertwined with its involvement in the Eastern Mediterranean dispute against Turkey as a result of the natural gas discovery in recent years in the region. France's identification of Turkey as an 'external enemy' reflects the former's political and economic concerns in regard to the Mediterranean gas reserves. Therefore, the envisaged French leadership in the region insists that the EU adopt an exclusionary political approach toward Turkey with the political and diplomatic support of France for Greece and Cyprus. The existing regional problems, however, need to be resolved on the basis of equity, not by ignoring the rights of the parties, but by integrating them. This is necessary for the peaceful resolution of these concerns.*

**Keywords:** France, Turkey, Greece, European Union, Eastern Mediterranean, Islamophobia

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## Introduction

**F**rance's Mediterranean policy can be analyzed from a historical perspective and through the actual conjuncture related to its geopolitical and geo-cultural elements, such as the West-East civilizational dilemma and colonization background. Although these two elements are complementary to each other, they intersect with the political and economic interests of the Turkish state in the region. Historically, Napoleon Bonaparte and Napoleon III consolidated the French presence in Africa and the Middle East. This was important to constitute a francophone world in these regions and protect the political and economic interests of France. It was a common strategy for the colonialist powers of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. World War I (WWI) emerged as one of the reasons for the conflict of interests of these powers. At the end of WWI, the League of Nations established a legal basis for European colonialism through the mandate system. This was part of France's mission *civilisatrice*, to maintain the French presence in the region. The French Mediterranean policy was established based directly on this historical heritage. Since 1960, the Gaullist Administration followed it in accordance with France's colonial past. Therefore, France could geopolitically install its political influence in Turkey's political hinterland in the Middle East and the Eastern Mediterranean.

The fact that France tries to maintain its political presence in the Middle East and the Eastern Mediterranean clearly challenges Turkey's foreign policy, and vice versa, Turkey's presence in the region also challenges France's foreign policy. For example, in 2019, the Libya-Turkey deal on the Maritime Boundary Treaty, in order to establish an Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) in the Mediterranean Sea, was considered by France as a real threat against the European Union (EU). From a geopolitical and geo-cultural view, France might suppose that Libya's southern neighbors, Chad, Niger, Mali, and Sudan, and possibly also its eastern neighbors, Tunisia and Algeria, would potentially be the next areas of penetration by Turkey, which means that the impact that France has on these ancient colonies would be at risk of weakening. In other words, the ascendancy of Turkey's influence on the region could lead to a reconfiguration of the power composition in Northern and Central Africa, to the detriment of France, which tries to follow a leadership policy in the Mediterranean.

The will of France to be leader in the Mediterranean unfolds within the multilayered interactions of many actors, especially the EU, whose involvement complicates the relations between France and Turkey. In order to mobilize public opinion against Turkey at the national, European, and international level, French leaders have promoted an anti-Turkey policy that has concentrated on a strategy of supporting the stances of European countries, especially Greece and Cyprus, even if Greece has limited sea territorial boundaries within the Eastern Mediterranean. Turkey has resisted the maximalist policy of Greece

supported by France, applying gunboat diplomacy to protect Turkish Cyprus and the rights of Turkey that have been ignored by France, Greece, Cyprus, and now Germany. The German mediation between Turkey and Greece can now be qualified as biased. However, some other countries, such as Spain, Italy, Bulgaria, and Hungary have preferred not to block the channels of dialogue with Turkey for certain strategic reasons. The political approach of Italy and Spain, even if it could not be completely defined as pro-Turkish, suggests that they would demand a more Europeanized Mediterranean policy rather than just accepting France's will to be a leader in the Mediterranean.

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Turkey is now emerging as a regional power that is capable of producing its own policies in the Middle East, Africa, and the Mediterranean, and this is of specific concern to France, which has claimed leadership in these regions. In this regard, the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, Jean-Yves Le Drian, has expressed that the government is worried about China's strategic influence, as well as that of Russia and Turkey, on the African continent.<sup>1</sup>

France's Mediterranean policy against Turkey has reached its realistic limits in the Eastern Mediterranean, and in order to influence public opinion and gain support against Turkey, some high-level French politicians have pursued a populist approach by instrumentalizing the religious cleavages in both France and Europe. This trend has helped France to apply exclusionary politics against Turkey from the European Union. As a result, French politics at both the national and international level seem paradoxical within the context of its national and European values. For example, the *Quai d'Orsay*, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of France, developed foreign policy strategies with Haftar in Libya and el-Sisi in Egypt,<sup>2</sup> whereas Macron has treated the Turkish position in Libya as a real threat to EU security. Additionally, the November 2015 Paris attacks in France were closely identified with Islamic values, and Erdogan's opposition to such rhetoric was spun in the media as the 'Turkish Question' which, like the old Eastern Question, allowed French leaders to gain European support in the Eastern Mediterranean.<sup>3</sup> In 2019, Macron accused Turkey of sometimes collaborating with ISIS intermediaries, stating that "when I look at Turkey, they are now fighting against those who fought alongside us. And sometimes they work with ISIS intermediaries."<sup>4</sup> In addition, during the Euro-Med 7 conference in Corsica, Macron qualified Turkey and Russia as two destabilizing factors in the Mediterranean.<sup>5</sup>

The essential questions that then arise are:

- (i) What is the historical background of the French Mediterranean policy that pushes the French leaders to follow an exclusionary approach against Turkey with a populist discursive strategy?
- (ii) What strategies has France developed for its aforementioned Mediterranean policy?
- (iii) What are the obstacles to these strategies?

This paper, therefore, attempts to investigate how France produced its Mediterranean policy, aiming at establishing control over the energy resources against Turkey through a populist and anti-Turkish discourse. The main hypothesis of this research is that France and French politicians focus on Turkey's Islamic and anti-European characteristics as part of a larger geopolitical strategy that aims at qualifying Turkey as an external threat to French foreign policy. French politicians have tried to base this policy on historical elements, similar to Huntington's clash of civilizations thesis, concentrated on the cultural and historical contrasts between the West and East. In this process, they conflate anti-Islamic and anti-Turkey rhetoric in order to consolidate European and French public opinion and convince their constituents that their aggressive foreign policy in the Eastern Mediterranean is necessary for the security of France and the EU, even if France and many EU countries have no maritime border in the Eastern Mediterranean. However, this discursive strategy has some limits when the presence of the Muslim communities in France and the colonial background of France are taken into consideration. This is why France's new policy toward French Muslims has failed and its aggressive Mediterranean policy against Turkey needs to soften, particularly due to the reopened dialogues between Turkey and Greece, and the position of other European countries such as Spain and Italy. The research method used herein consists of a review of the existing literature on the historical background of the French Mediterranean policy and a discourse analysis of the speeches of the leaders and of the media in France.

In what follows, the paper will first discuss the historical background of France's Mediterranean policy. Second, France's policy in the Mediterranean will be analyzed at the national and European level. Finally, this analysis will outline the limits of the French policy in the Mediterranean as a result of Turkey's position.

## Historical Background of France's Mediterranean Policy

France's Mediterranean policy has deep historical routes that extend back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century when Ottoman Sultans granted France commercial and economic privileges in order to conduct their activities in a more secure way.

France benefitted from these commercial rights, which were accorded directly by the Sultan because the Ottoman rulers intended to prevent an eventual alliance between the Habsburg and French Empires. Indeed, Ottoman soldiers, under the command of Barbaros, were hosted in the winter of 1543 in Toulon, in order to organize a military assault over the Holy Roman Empire.<sup>6</sup> This strategic alliance with the Ottoman Empire opened

the door for France to develop its economic acquisitions in North Africa and the Middle East. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, France's accorded commercial rights progressively turned into political hegemony within the Ottoman territories, in which the different European powers were already massively involved. The French campaign in Egypt and Syria in the 1800s weakened Ottoman rule in Africa and the Middle East and accelerated the peripheralization process of the provinces.

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Given its advantages, France could invent an economic and political area in the Mediterranean in accordance with two approaches: first, the Saint Simonian perspective, as a peaceful project, and second, the intensive concentration of European powers' strategies on the total division of the 'sick man of Europe,' to settle 'the Eastern Question.' On this point, Chevalier defended the opinion that the sea could offer the opportunity for consensus between Western powers on the Eastern Question.<sup>7</sup> Ultimately, settling the Eastern Question required the establishment of a Eurocentric structure in the Mediterranean, to the detriment of Turkish sovereignty in the region. Thus the strategy of weakening the Turkish sovereignty in the region had become a central part of the francophone and colonization ideology for France.<sup>7</sup> Here, France's colonial empire assumed a *mission civilisatrice* in the Maghreb on the basis of the alleged *Pax Romana* and declared itself "the rightful guardian of the true Latin Mediterranean unity, in opposition to the political rule imposed by the Ottoman Empire..."<sup>8</sup> Thus, the Mediterranean could have been transformed into the *Mare Nostrum* of France or a French lake<sup>9</sup> as part of the territorialization strategy. However, this political ambition was stymied by the outbreak of WWI; by the end of the war, colonialism had acquired a legal dimension as the mandate system in favor of the war winners, especially France and the United Kingdom (UK), a system that was solidified through the creation of the League of Nations in 1920.<sup>10</sup>

### ***Impact of Decolonization on France's Mediterranean Policy***

European colonialism began to take the shape of a political protectorate in African and Middle Eastern countries as a result of the San Remo Resolution,

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which was passed on April 26, 1920. Thereby, France was able to maintain control of the Suez Canal and influence over the Mediterranean until its defeat in 1940 by the Nazi occupation in WWII. The fact that France was liberated by the United States forces in 1945 meant the acceptance of the politically and economically dominant position of the U.S., which ensured financial aid to

reconstruct Europe after WWII, and protection from Communist expansion during the Cold War. Henceforth, French policy in the Mediterranean was supposed to be harmonic with NATO and the U.S. Nevertheless, de Gaulle chose to underline his intention to pursue autonomous politics in the Mediterranean in the 1960s,<sup>11</sup> although France had already become a secondary power in the Mediterranean Sea as a result of the loss of its colonies in Africa, which allowed the U.S. to increase its leadership in the region.<sup>12</sup>

The decolonization process had become a prestigious concern for the Gaullist Administration with the Independence of Algeria in 1962. In addition, France followed a cordial policy with Israel until 1967 in order to counterbalance the emancipation of the Arabs in the Middle East. However, de Gaulle needed to reconsider this policy with Israel because of the Six Days War, which caused the instability of the Straits of Tiran and the Suez Canal.<sup>13</sup> The outbreak of the fourth Arab-Israeli war in 1973 justified France's political concerns. In the same year, the oil shock complicated both the decolonization issue and regional security. Giuliano Garavini postulates that the oil crisis was in direct relation to the political and economic independence of the decolonizing countries.<sup>14</sup> As a result, France had to soften its anti-Britain policy in favor of adhesion to the European Community in order to manage the complex processes related to decolonization, energy security, and regional instability.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, the British governors preferred to collaborate with the U.S. to regulate the oil strategy of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC).<sup>16</sup>

The foreign policy that was developed so that France would be an eventual dominant actor in the Mediterranean can be explained by its will to regain a leadership position in the international system. Since 1970, France's role in international affairs has tended to be diminished due to the economic and social issues that gradually weakened the military capacity of the government. France's authoritarian decisions and policies toward the Mediterranean and Maghreb were even interpreted as the "politics of weakness" by Edward A. Kolodziej in 1971.<sup>17</sup> The Gaullist doctrine aimed to create a point of resis-





Demonstration march in front of the Gare du Nord, in Paris to protest against Islamophobia, on November 10, 2019.

GEOFFROY VAN DER HASSELT / AFP via Getty Images

tance in the western Mediterranean, with smaller actors, such as Spain, which needed political support against Britain in Gibraltar, against the superpowers of the era, the U.S. and Soviet Russia, while France tried to maintain close ties with countries on the southern side of the Mediterranean Sea, especially Tunisia and Libya.<sup>18</sup> This political architecture showed the multiplication of the actors by the 1980s.

### ***Changing Roles by the 1980s: Multiplication of the Actors in the Region***

Since the 1980s, France has had to develop a sort of cooperation policy with the other important powers in the region, such as the U.S., which considers the Mediterranean a strategic entry point from which to penetrate into Eurasia and the Middle East, and where Turkey plays a pivotal role, especially with its military base in İncirlik,<sup>18</sup> and Cyprus geographically represents a Turkish forward presence. This is why neither the European countries nor the U.S. recognized the status quo that Turkey put forward in 1974 on the island of Cyprus in order to protect Turkish community rights. It was involuntarily tolerated due to Turkey's strategic position with regard to the Cold War against Russian expansion. As a strategic partner of NATO and the U.S., Turkey was now at the heart of the geopolitical and energetical issues in the Mediterranean, notably opposing Soviet expansion in the Middle East and Africa.

The changing roles by the 1980s can be interpreted as a multiplication of the actors in the region. On the one hand, France tried to revitalize its old colonial

policy, which aimed to control the Mediterranean and the Middle East using its historical ties.<sup>9</sup> On the other, France attempted to manage the positions of the other European states in the Mediterranean, such as Italy and Spain, and to maintain French political influence on the African coastlines. France's Mediterranean strategy now had to shift from individualism to cooperation established on two geopolitical points, comprising the Mediterranean Action Plan (MAP) and the Western Mediterranean Forum (5+5 Dialogue). The first initiative had the objective of bringing the 16 Mediterranean states and the European community together in 1975 by creating a legal framework in accordance with the Barcelona Convention, which was adopted in 1976. The Barcelona process was revised in 1995 in order to produce policies in line with protecting the environment and fostering sustainable development in the region.<sup>19</sup> The 5+5 Dialogue Forum was officially launched in 1990 between the European countries of the north coast of the Mediterranean Sea and the southern side of the Mediterranean in Africa, with the goal of negotiating on thematic problems, focusing on migration, human trafficking, etc. This forum clearly aimed to establish the necessary mechanisms of integration for the European states on the western coast of the Mediterranean by forming a peripheral zone from the African countries.

These initiatives remain important to understanding how the Barcelona process was developed and which geopolitical predilections allowed France to pretend that it played a central role in the Mediterranean, and even sometimes bypass European institutions. Turkey's geographical location, which extends from Eastern Europe to Caucasia, is a key element to demonstrate the kind of strategic position that France would like to occupy in the zone. Furthermore, as a potential member of the EU, Turkey could play a more active role in the Barcelona Process, notably within the framework of border control, which is actually a crucial problem for Europe because of irregular migration coming from the Middle East.

The readmission agreement concluded in 2013 between Ankara and Berlin could be a good example at this point to understand why France opposes Turkey's reinforced position and its agreement with Germany independent of the EU. During an interview with the journalists of *Groupe Canal+* in Abidjan in 2016, former French President Nicolas Sarkozy overcriticized that François Holland's France had no role in the negotiations between Turkey and Germany. He expressed, "I am amazed that Merkel negotiated with Erdoğan; was Holland busy? France is not concerned? What are these bilateral negotiations? It does not make sense." He also considered that the visa exoneration for 80 million Turks would make the Schengen zone an immense migration area. For him "this is blackmail."<sup>20</sup> In order to counterbalance Germany in the European Union, Sarkozy's France had developed the Mediterranean Union (MU) project, bypassing the European institutions, which was an important step in im-



posing France's leadership in Europe and the Mediterranean. The Joint Declaration of the Paris Summit for the Mediterranean held on July 13, 2008, clearly noted that "while complementing actions relating to its regional dimension, the Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) will be independent of the EU's enlargement policy, accession negotiations, and the pre-accession process."<sup>21</sup> These clear parameters concretely placed Turkey out of the political configuration in the Mediterranean. Nonetheless, questions about Turkey, such as visa exoneration, full-membership to the EU, and the Turkish presence in the Middle East and Africa, are concerns for France, as explained in the next sections.

**The current political spectrum, with the rise of racism in many European countries, is closely related to Christian-conservative, nationalistic, and Islamophobic rhetoric**

### **Qualifying Turkey as a Threat against France and EU Security**

This historical panorama, tracing the general lines of French Mediterranean policies, sheds light on France's actual political tendency in the region. This tendency can be grouped into three different categories: i) reinforcing the French impact in the EU, ii) maintaining a strategic position in Africa, and iii) expanding France's political and military role in the eastern Mediterranean. It is worth noting that the last two elements reveal the issue of legitimizing France's actions, extending sometimes to the use of hard power, in international, European, and French public opinion. Since the Sarkozy presidency, France has been trying to create an imagined external enemy that could be instrumentalized to legitimize its political actions in foreign policy, and Turkey was seemingly identified as an ideal figure for this political purpose. In 2009, Sarkozy announced his persistent opposition to Turkey's full accession to the EU, stating, "I have always been opposed to this entry and I remain so. I think I can say that an immense majority of the Member States (of the EU) agree with France's position."<sup>22</sup> During an interview in Abidjan, Sarkozy clearly stated again that Turkey is located in Asia Minor, which means that it is not European, neither geographically nor culturally nor historically, adding that, "If we said that, that is the death of Europe... even Russia is more European than Turkey." Antichristian historical narratives about the Ottoman Empire, Turks, and the political development of modern Turkey under conservative governments have been strategically and actively used to create the specter of an unrealistic threat and imagined enemy to serve in consolidating European integrity and underestimating the social problems of French society, whose numbers included 5.7 million Muslims as of 2016, or 8.8 percent of the population, according to the Pew Research Center.<sup>23</sup>

## **It can be said that the main concerns of the French state have been focalized on an eventual geographical reunification between Azerbaijan and Turkey, passing by Nakhichevan**

interpreted as “the theft of history” in Jack Goody’s terms.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, the terrorist attacks in France brought Islamophobia to its peak at a political and social level, where the state of emergency that has limited the fundamental rights and freedoms of Muslims has turned into a sort of witch hunt for Muslim families.<sup>27</sup> As a result, the French government has operationalized repressive political mechanisms on the Muslim community by instrumentalizing freedom of expression while involving a ‘go-it-alone foreign policy’ in the Mediterranean against Turkey.

The current political spectrum, with the rise of racism in many European countries, is closely related to Christian-conservative, nationalistic, and Islamophobic rhetoric.<sup>24</sup> The EU has attempted to handle the refugee crisis, which stems from instability in the Middle East, by using an exclusionary political approach based on the fictional ‘civilizational dilemma’ of Samuel Huntington,<sup>25</sup> which can be purely

### **Effects of France’s Mediterranean Policy on Internal Affairs**

Before analyzing the effects of France’s Mediterranean policy on domestic affairs, a brief account of politicians’ use of foreign policy issues in domestic affairs will be helpful. The discursive strategy of politicians in foreign affairs should be taken into account in order to understand how French politicians influence or create public opinion. The post-structuralist tradition insists generally that the Foucauldian views of discourse analysis in foreign policy are adopted to decipher central foreign policy concepts, such as state and nation profits, especially for the EU. Senem Aydın Düzgit notes that this tradition does not necessarily consider the linguistic dimension of the discourse.<sup>28</sup> For this paper, it was necessary to focus on the language that French politicians use and in which context they use it. For example, it is arguable that the insistence on using words like ‘Islam’ and ‘terrorism’ or ‘Turkey’ and ‘Islamic state’ in the discourses of the French politicians are part of a strategy to impact and create public opinion. Within the Mediterranean, this also represents the geopolitical dimension over the aforementioned civilizational dilemma. Michael J. Shapiro underlines that the two sides of the discursive strategy, i.e. politicians and public, that resulted in the geopolitics could be directly related in the purpose of what this paper has aimed to show. First, the political discourse in foreign affairs has taken a form in accordance with the existing, conflicting camps and strategic and/or potential alliances. Second, the actors have developed their discourse in order to gain some economic power and

authority at the international level.<sup>29</sup> Eckart Woertz and Eduard Soler Lecha underline that the French leaders “embraced populist connotations in building on people’s fears (Turkey), emotions (France’s *grandeur*)...”<sup>30</sup> Thus, Turkey would easily be considered by the French public as a threat to France’s geopolitical interests.

How do French politicians and the press try to delegitimize Turkey’s presence in the region by deploying efforts to legitimize France’s position against Turkey? Here, France seemingly concentrates its policy on the creation of an imagined enemy. Turkey is considered to have values and principles that are opposite to those pursued by the political community in France. The Macron Administration has tended to generally identify Turkey as a ‘real threat’ to European democracy, fundamental rights, freedom of expression, etc. Policy building by the administration has attempted to legitimize actions against Turkey both at the national and international level.

On France’s role in the Eastern Mediterranean, French journalists and scholars are divided into two camps: those who try to convince the French public of the necessity of France’s current military presence in the Eastern Mediterranean, and those who criticize this position as being incompatible with France’s democratic and republican values. Therefore, the official support of the French state to Haftar and Sisi is a subject notably questioned and discussed by the second camp. Piotr Smolar interprets France’s positioning, with the exception of the putschist faction in Libya, as a “lost bet.”<sup>31</sup> According to Frédéric Bobin and Marc Semo, France had highly invested in the Haftar regime and is now trying to maintain its political gains in Libya.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, a think-tank known as Mars, and is engaged to produce analyses to reinforce the strategic interests relating to the defense and security industry that is the basis of French sovereignty, published an article titled, “Why France’s Intervention in the Eastern Mediterranean Was Necessary,” in order to convince interior public opinion. With very nationalistic rhetoric, this group fanatically defended the recalibration of French foreign policy toward the ambition of being the policeman of the Mediterranean against Turkey. Likewise, the group paradoxically noted that “contrary to what one might have heard, Turkey did not behave like a ‘rogue state.’ It simply has interests to defend, and employs somewhat frustrating methods to do so, but, once again, nothing illegal.”<sup>33</sup> This affirmation simply confirms the weak legal basis of the French presence in the Eastern Mediterranean against Turkey.

Opposition to Turkey, whose population is almost entirely composed of Muslims, has seemingly allowed the Macron Administration to consolidate popular support in France that is politically agitated by the rhetoric of Islamophobia. Without making any distinction between Islam and terrorism, Macron announced on October 29, 2020, after a terrorist attack at a Church

in Nice, that Catholic France had been hit by “Islamist terrorism.”<sup>34</sup> After the recent murder of teacher Samuel Paty by a terrorist, many public administrators have also decided to expose the caricatures of Charlie Hebdo on the walls of public buildings in accordance with the freedom of expression,<sup>35</sup> while the French state has already started a sort of witch hunt against Muslim associations and has introduced a new regulation for an accreditation system for *imams* within a ‘Republican chart’ to have a more ‘institutionalized’ Islam.<sup>36</sup>

This step has created a huge polemic between the principles of respect and freedom at the national and international levels. Some leaders, such as Justin Trudeau of Canada, expressed that liberties are not limitless, whereas the leader of the leftist cleavage in France, Jean-Luc Mélançon, clearly said that, “there is hatred against Muslims disguised under laicity in France.”<sup>37</sup> Former Minister of Ecology, Ségolène Royal, also treated the situation as insulting toward Muslims.<sup>38</sup> Finally, Macron had to address a letter to the *Financial Times*, clarifying that “France is against ‘Islamist separatism’ never Islam.”<sup>39</sup> Contrariwise, the Minister of the Interior, Gérard Darmanin, affirmed that families opposing anti-Islam cartoons would be condemned with deportation,<sup>40</sup> which implies that the liberty of expression remains, and is, therefore, limited for these groups. Even if Darmanin’s political perspective is right-wing, using Marxist terminology, he has recently published a book titled *Islamist Separatism: Manifesto for Laïcité*, in which the enemy of France is identified as “Islamism, breeding ground for terrorism.”<sup>41</sup> In France, *laïcité* no longer functions as a simple separation between religion and the state; rather, it is instrumentalized by the government to dominate and control Muslim communities.

This policy has been extremely criticized by Muslim countries and by Turkey. French products have been boycotted in many countries with a domino effect. However, French leaders have mostly focused on the boycott call made by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. French Minister of Economy, Bruno Le Maire, has considered it “unacceptable.”<sup>42</sup> Within the escalation of tensions related to Islamophobia, the Mediterranean, and Turkish politics toward the Karabakh conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia, France finally brandished the threat of abolishing the customs union with Turkey, which signifies the demand of economic sanctions being imposed on Turkey.

In fact, the *Quai d’Orsay*, strongly criticized Turkish political support for Azerbaijan during the Second Karabakh war with Armenia. Le Drian accused Turkey of instigating an international conflict.<sup>43</sup> Moreover, Macron declared in an interview for *Le Figaro* on October 1, 2020, that Turkey had sent jihadists from Syria to Baku: “According to our own information, 300 fighters left Syria to reach Baku via Gaziantep.”<sup>44</sup> After that, on October 4, 2020, French par-

liamentarians prepared a motion for a resolution on the protection of the Armenian people and the Christian communities of Europe and the East. The text claimed that “If France, its European partners or other countries are the objects of threats or direct and targeted terrorist attacks, other peoples and countries are subject to the presence of jihadist fighters in armed conflicts: this is the case of the Kurdish allies of France who are confronted on a daily basis in northern Syria with Islamist militias supported by Turkey.” Despite such religious rhetoric against Turkey and Islam, and its title as well, the proposition ironically contends that “the bond and friendship between France and Armenia are secular.”<sup>45</sup> In such ways, French politicians have tried to draw direct links among Turkey, jihadism, and so-called Islamist terrorism without any concrete evidence, by means of their discursive strategy.

## **The *Pax Mediterranea* of Macron mainly consists of the exclusion of Turkey from the region in order to repenetrate into the Middle East and Eastern Mediterranean**

It can be said that the main concerns of the French state have been focalized on an eventual geographical reunification between Azerbaijan and Turkey, passing by Nakhichevan. This is partly due to the fact that the State Oil Company of Azerbaijan, SOCAR, bought the Greek national oil company DESFA in 2013. This is what was interpreted by France as a strategic step in the financial control of the transport routes and energy infrastructure in favor of Turkey and Azerbaijan. The recent political approach that has been taken by France and Greece clearly reflects their revindication to have Turkey politically isolated from the EU and the Mediterranean. France's political and military support for Greece, evidenced by its sale of Rafale jets and frigates can be thought of as the result of this exclusionary policy. The *Pax Mediterranea* of Macron mainly consists of the exclusion of Turkey from the region in order to repenetrate into the Middle East and Eastern Mediterranean.<sup>46</sup>

### ***Europeanization of France's Mediterranean Policy: From Individualistic Initiative to Cooperation***

The MU was consistent with France's policy building on the revitalization of its Mediterranean identity, owing to the fact that Sarkozy's discursive strategy had largely focused on the cultural dimension of being Mediterranean. Due to the old *mission civilisatrice* of the French colonial empire, Sarkozy had reassumed the civilizational integration between the countries of the region in order to underline French leadership along the Euro-Mediterranean axis. Nevertheless, the main opposition to this individualistic initiative came from non-Mediterranean countries, such as Germany, and European institutions. Even if Italy and Spain welcomed this political vision, which had



## **Turkey actively contributes to European security as a key actor of the NATO-EU cooperation through its military and diplomatic capacity, as well as its cultural and historical background in the region**

been triggered by Sarkozy, they preferred to Europeanize the MU within the Barcelona process.<sup>47</sup> France's individualist initiative had to therefore be converted into the UfM in 2008, while Henri Guiano, one of Sarkozy's special advisors, was appointed as the head of the inter-ministerial mission of the UfM,<sup>48</sup> on the grounds that the UfM announced the requirement of cooperation and collaboration

among the Mediterranean countries. This coordination needed to take place along more institutional channels and to maintain the diplomatic and political weight of France within the UfM.

The UfM aimed to overhaul interstate cooperation, which meant sharing power. However, as Gillespie states, "France under Sarkozy has attempted to exercise 'leadership' in a more unilateral way"<sup>49</sup> in the Mediterranean policy. Contrary to this policy, the UfM reflects the repositioning of the other European countries, especially Spain and Italy, because this Union allows them to gain influence in the Mediterranean. France might have considered these two countries as 'complementary partners' for its own leadership policy in the Mediterranean. The UfM was therefore responsible for balancing the different powers in the area. In addition, due to the political instability in Africa and the Middle East, the UfM needed to develop a more proactive policy in the gestion of the irregular migration crisis and secure the energy corridor in the Euro-Mediterranean space.

Since the 2010s, with the discovery of new energy resources, the Mediterranean has become a more strategic area, where new challenges have emerged among the actors. Due to the plurality of actors in the area, it was not easy to ensure security and cooperation at the same time. Here, the European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP) highlighted the cooperation with non-European countries as well. This objective of cooperation has overtaken France's individualistic policy in the Mediterranean and its defense capacity. This is why Turkey remains a strategic actor in the region for the stability and security of energy corridor projects, such as TurkStream, the Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline (TANAP), etc. This political reality highlights Turkey's importance for the EU. French foreign policy has ignored this reality and preferred to pose itself against Turkey by creating a political rapprochement with Greece and the Greek Administration of Southern Cyprus (GASC) in order to gain more economic profit over Total oil and the gas company (Map 1) and to attain a political position in the area. This point illustrates the limits of the French

Mediterranean policy. Within this framework, it is not surprising that during the European summit of December 11, 2020, France and Greece insisted on heavy economic measures for Turkey; however, only minor sanctions were imposed in order to maintain stability in the region.<sup>50</sup>

Map 1: Offshore Exploration Licences Granted by the GASC



Source: Stanič and Karbuz, (2020).<sup>51</sup>

## Limits of the French Policy in the Mediterranean: Turkey's Position

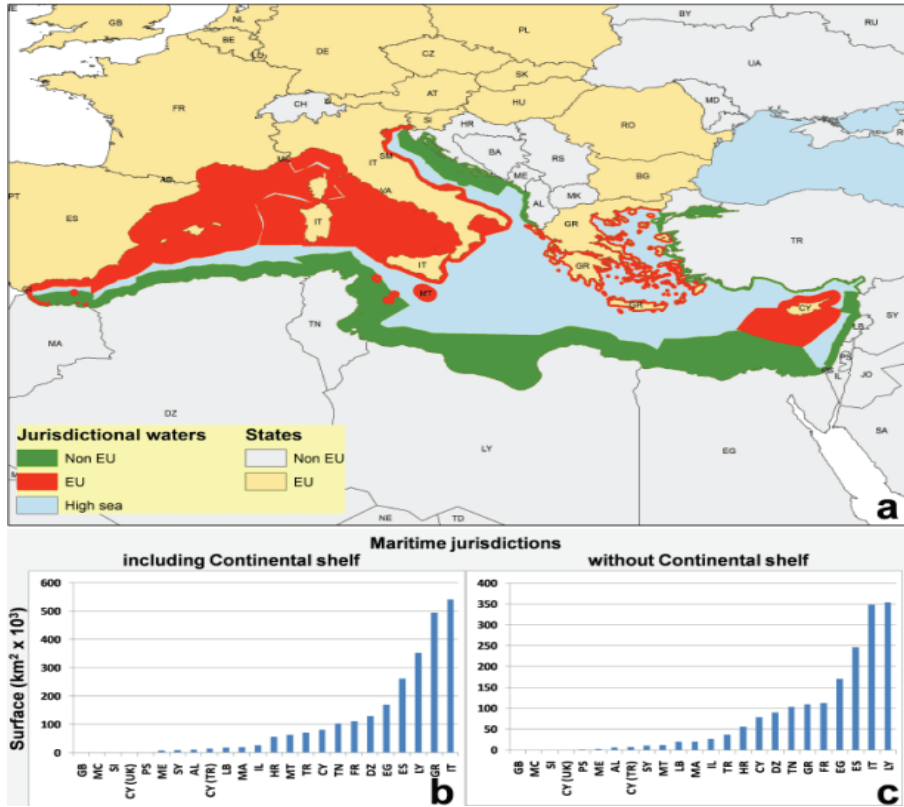
Turkey actively contributes to European security as a key actor of the NATO-EU cooperation through its military and diplomatic capacity, as well as its cultural and historical background in the region.<sup>52</sup> Even if Turkey would like to play more of a role in the ESDP, some European actors, such as the GASC, have set in place obstacles that demand Turkey's participation in the European Defense Agency.<sup>53</sup> Greece seeks to impose political and economic sanctions on Turkey via the EU by ignoring the Turkish thesis about the equitable sharing of energy reserves in the Eastern Mediterranean, reasoned by

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both its own coasts and that of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC). This type of politicized action puts political cooperation at risk in order to exploit the energy potential of the region via secured transport infrastructures. Without the political integration and contributions of Turkey, the objectives set out in the EU Energy Community Treaty, which focused on the EU's energy security and its dependence on Russia, would not be properly achieved. In order to vary its energetical corridors, in 2008, the EU determined that Turkey was the main transit country.<sup>54</sup> Since then, Turkey has been investing in numerous gas infrastructures, such as the TANAP, the Trans Adriatic Pipeline (TAP), etc., to make itself a real energy hub.<sup>55</sup> Nevertheless, backed by France, Greece has promoted Turkey's removal from the EastMed pipeline project in order to reinforce its strategic importance and position in the EU.

The collaboration between France and Greece against Turkey on the eastern side of the region has made it difficult to find a beneficial arrangement for every actor. With a limited coastline on the Mediterranean, Greece's claims have a weak legitimate basis, while the argument by France about defending the EU-integrated coastal zone management (ICZM) has legal constraints as well. Gibson states, "Although international law adds a valuable extra dimension to national and EC legislation, it is not a self-sufficient basis for ICZM."<sup>56</sup> In addition, Turkey has claimed *ab initio* and *ipso facto* rights in the Eastern Mediterranean, at the coordinates of 32°16'18" E, 33°40' N. If there were a treaty of limitation imposed in this region, it must be done with the participation of all states in the region. The GASC cannot represent the island of Cyprus alone, as the TRNC must be integrated into the process as well.<sup>57</sup> As Turkey did not sign the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea in 1982, the dispositions of this convention relating to sea boundary delimitations cannot be imposed on Turkey. On December 21, 1995, Turkey informed the UN Secretariat that "the signature and ratification of the Convention by Greece and the subsequent declaration in this regard shall neither prejudice nor affect the existing rights and legitimate interests of Turkey with respect to maritime jurisdiction areas in the Aegean,"<sup>58</sup> which also meant that the Seville map was not even considered for Turkey (Map 2).<sup>59</sup> Turkey fully reserved its rights according to international law. Because the legal dispute among the GASC, Greece, and Turkey is directly related to the continental shelf where the hydrocarbons are located, the support of France for Greece and the GASC, by instrumentalizing the European dimension, was not realistic.

### Map 2: Maritime Jurisdictions of the Mediterranean States According to Sevilla Map



Source: Cinnirella et al., (2014).<sup>60</sup>

## Conclusion

France's Mediterranean policy is multilayered. It is constructed on the civilizational dilemma, as in the colonial era. Due to its historical background and colonial past, France has attempted to be the leader of the EU in the Mediterranean. Identifying Turkey as an 'external enemy' justifies France's foreign policy ambitions in the Mediterranean, in general, and in the Eastern Mediterranean in particular. Therefore, the envisaged French leadership in the region has insisted that the EU adopt an exclusionary political approach toward Turkey. This has reinforced the ties that France has with the GASC and Greece; while inside the country, French leaders have tried to consolidate their political position with populist anti-Islam and anti-Turkey rhetoric. While the terrorist attacks in France have caused French leaders to agitate the population over the religious-cultural cleavage, Macron has directly called on the EU to form a united front against Turkey, despite Turkey's strategic role in Europe's energy security and active position in NATO because, for Macron, Turkey is no longer a part-

## Turkey's role vis-à-vis the EU cannot be reduced to being a peripheral country that would have complemented the energy stability and general security of the continent

Bishops' Conference of France, in his speech in the French senate, reproved that the repressive controversial separatism law on Islamism gives "the feeling that believers are citizens of whom we should be wary."<sup>61</sup> Moreover, French civil society resists the authoritarian tendencies of the Macron administration.

Within the framework of realpolitik, France's Mediterranean policy has no realistic basis over the long-term, even if it actually would contribute to the popularity of Macron in France and possibly the EU. However, populism is not helping to manage the issues in the Mediterranean. Turkey's role vis-à-vis the EU cannot be reduced to being a peripheral country that would have complemented the energy stability and general security of the continent. Considering Turkey as a 'strategic partner,' in lieu of a full member of the EU, mostly signifies the unilateral approach of the European club as a result of the exclusionary policy. The problems, such as TRNC rights, sharing oil and gas reserves, need to be resolved on an equity basis, not by ignoring the rights of the parties, but by integrating them. This is necessary for the peaceful resolution of the Eastern Mediterranean issue. ■

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