

THE ENERGY CRISIS OF EUROPE AND THE TURKMEN GAS: A PROBLEM AND A SOLUTION? - 06.01.2023

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There is no doubt that the ongoing war in Ukraine has had devastating effects on Europe, and specifically on the economies of European Union countries, which has led to the situation being referred as Europes energy crisis. Over the summer, EU countries made effort to fill their gas storages before Russia permanently stops supplying the majority of the gas as a retaliation to the sanctions of the West**[1]**. However, this is reportedly insufficient for Europe to deal with the energy crisis.

Paolo Gentiloni, the European (Union) Commissioner for Economy, has indicated that the EU will continue to suffer from energy supplies unless the war in Ukraine ends next year **[2].** In addition to Gentling, the International Energy Agency (IEA) has also warned that the EU countries may face a harder challenge in 2023 because Chinese LNG demand will increase while Russian gas exports will decrease to a dramatic level**[3]**. According to an IEA report, the EU may lack 27 billion cubic meters of gas in 2023 in case Russia fully cuts the gas deliveries and LNG imports of China turns back to 2021 levels**[4]**.

For this reason, EU countries have turned their faces to new LNG and natural gas deals. For instance, the US and the Gulf countries signed several LNG agreements with EU countries**[5]**. On the first week of December, the UK and the US declared a new partnership, which will decrease EU countries dependence on Russian energy exports**[6].** According to this new UK-US Energy Security and Affordability Partnership, the EU will

receive 9 to 10 bcm of LNG, which is more than twice of its amount last year, through UK terminals, in 2023**[7].** Qatar has made two sales and purchase agreements with ConocoPhillips, which is a US oil and gas company, to transfer 2 million tons of LNG to Germany annually**[8]**.

Apart from those, the EU initiated REPowerEU to deal with the energy crisis. This project aims to decrease EUs dependency on Russian gas by two thirds by investing 300 billion euros to energy**[9]**.

While the EUs search for the solution for the energy crisis continues, the natural gas reserves of Central Asia can be a partial solution. In this context, a trilateral meeting between Türkiye, Azerbaijan, and Turkmenistan was held in Awaza, on 14 December 2022. This meeting demonstrated that Ankara can play a significant role in connecting gas rich Central Asian countries to Western countries**.[10]**.

The details of the project, which aims to transfer Turkmen gas to Europe via the Caspian Sea and Türkiye, was handled when Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan met his Azerbaijani and Turkmen counterparts in Turkmenistan**[11]**, before the trilateral summit in Awaza. Then, President Erdoğan mentioned that, the project was already on the agenda and the technical as well as financial details of the project was discussed on the trilateral summit in Awaza**[12]**. The main aim of this project is to transport Turkmen gas via TANAP or a new line and contributing to the energy security of Europe as well as fortifying Türkiyes position of being an energy hub.

The significance of this initiative was highlighted by Sohbet Karbuz, a leading energy scholar and the Director of Hydrocarbons in *Observatoire Méditerranéen De Lenergie* (Mediterranean Energy Observatory/OME - the association of energy companies of Mediterranean countries) in Paris. According to Karbuz, Europe should support this because the Southern Gas Corridor is a priority for Europe**[13]**. He added that the natural gas to be connected through Europe via Türkiye and Azerbaijan is more logical for the EU than buying LNG from the US or relying on the spot LNG market**[14]**. He also stressed that carrying Central Asian gas via Türkiye is a much safer solution for the EU**[15]**. According to him, Even in the current conjuncture, every billion cubic meters is important for Europe**[16]**. In fact, he emphasized that, it is especially necessary for southeast countries to find a trustworthy country and corridor, and that this project can be a solution in this context**[17]**. In addition to those ideas, Karbuz declared that the main issue for the EU is initiating new gas supply lines to European countries which are most dependent on Russian gas exports**[18]**. In this context, Karbuz underlined that this initiative is especially important for countries that have no access to LNG, such as Romania, Bulgaria, and Ukraine**[19]**.

Connecting the natural gas of Central Asia to Europe by passing through Türkiye has been a long project that dates back to 1990s**[20]**. However, Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan did not manage to agree on building a pipeline to carry Turkmen gas to Europe via Türkiye and Azerbaijan earlier due to a maritime rights dispute**[21]**. This changed in 2021 when the sides reached an agreement that allows them to produce gas in a disputed area: the Dostluq Field**[22]**. This agreement provided Turkmenistan, which has the second largest

natural gas field in the world, to export its gas to Europe.

In general, it can be concluded that vast resources of Central Asia can be a solution for Europe that has been energy starved due to the war in Ukraine. However, it must be stressed that the role of Türkiye is crucial for the EU as it stands as an important energy route. In a sense, as a strong regional power located in a strategic geography, Türkiye is indispensable for the EU. Within this perspective, it is only logical of the EU to consider Türkiye as an important actor to solve the energy crisis.

*_Photograph_: https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/fandd/issues/2022/12/beating-the-european-energy-crisis-Zettelmeyer

[1] Sandor Zsiros, Europes Energy Crisis Even Worse Next Winter If No End To Ukraine War, Warns Paolo Gentiloni, *Euronews*, November 23, 2022, https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2022/11/22/europes-energy-crisis-even-worse-next-winter-if-no-end-to-ukraine-war-warns-paolo-gentilon

[2] *Ibid*.

[3] John Benny, 2023 may be a sterner test for EU amid dwindling Russian gas exports, IEA say, *NBusiness*, December 12, 2022, https://www.thenationalnews.com/business/energy/2022/12/12/2023-may-be-a-sterner-test-for-eu-amid-dwindling-russian-gas-exports-iea-says/

[4] *Ibid.*

[5] *Ibid.*

[6] *Ibid.*

[7] *Ibid.*

[8] *Ibid.*

[9] *Ibid.*

[10] Murat Sofuoğlu, How the Turkic World can become a global alternative energy source, *TRT World*, December 20, 2022, https://www.trtworld.com/magazine/how-the-turkic-world-can-become-a-global-alternative-energy-source-63684

[11] Türkiye discusses financial, technical details to bring Turkmen gas to Europe, *Daily Sabah*, December 15, 2022, https://www.dailysabah.com/business/energy/turkiye-discusses-financial-technical-details-to-bring-turkmen-gas-to-europe

[12] *Ibid*.

[13] *Ibid.*

[14] *Ibid.*

[15] *Ibid.*

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[17] Türkiye discusses financial, technical details to bring Turkmen gas to Europe, *Daily Sabah.*

[18] *Ibid.*

[19] *Ibid.*

[20] *Ibid*.

[21] *Ibid*.

[22] *Ibid.*

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