

DEVELOPMENTS IN LINE WITH TÜRKİYE'S GOAL OF BECOMING A REGIONAL ENERGY HUB

Bekir Caner ŞAFAK

Scholar in Residence

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Energy security constitutes one of the most important issues of Turkish foreign policy. Türkiyes special geostrategic location between the European and Asian continents gives it a key role in energy transit to Europe from Central Asia, the Caucasus, and the Middle East. As such, Türkiye is an important economic and strategic partner for both energy exporters and energy importers. On the other hand, it is essential for the European Union (EU) to ensure an increased diversity of sources and routes within the scope of a common energy policy and, as a result, to ensure energy efficiency and security. When these two facts are assessed together, Türkiyes strategic importance in the establishment of Europe's energy security is clear. In this direction, Türkiye aims to become a corridor for energy deliveries and a regional energy center.

After the agreement between Moscow and Kiev expired on 1 January and was not renewed, TurkStream is now the only remaining route for the transport of Russian gas to Europe.[1] In addition, the Southern Gas Corridor, of which the Trans Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline (TANAP) is the most important part, has come to the fore in the energy crisis experienced by Europe following the Russia-Ukraine War. With a capacity of 16 billion cubic meters, this route is planned to be gradually increased to 24 billion cubic meters and then to 31 billion cubic meters with additional investments.[2] On the other hand, high-level dialogues between Türkiye and the EU on energy were suspended in 2019 due to the Cyprus issue, and although the current potential could not be materialized, Türkiye is determined to restart these interrupted negotiations with its diplomatic efforts and to realize its potential as an important natural gas supplier in the region.[3] In line with this strategy, Türkiye envisions becoming a regional energy hub, positioning itself not only as a critical geographical corridor for energy resources, but also as a center of international energy trade.[4]

Developments regarding Türkiyes goal of becoming a regional energy hub should be evaluated together with the Middle Corridor Initiative. Türkiyes hosting of both energy and

transport corridors represents an important opportunity for the development of Eurasian connectivity and places Türkiye, which has historically had the mission of being a link between Europe and Asia, in a pivotal position.[5] Asad Majeed Khan, Secretary General of the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), described Türkiye as the window to the Western world and stated that Türkiye is positioned as the driving force of growth across Eurasia and acts as a vital bridge.[6]

In light of the information provided above, the natural gas supply agreement signed between BOTAŞ and Turkmengaz, which envisages the start of delivery as of 1 March 2025, is an important development in enhancing Türkiyes energy security and strengthening its goal of becoming an energy hub. The transport of Turkmen gas via Iran through swap agreements or the construction of the Trans-Caspian pipeline in the long term are being discussed. Although the amount of gas to be delivered in the first phase (1.3 billion cubic meters by the end of 2025) is small in terms of Türkiyes needs, it is nevertheless important to include it in the system. Turkmenistan, which has an annual production capacity of approximately 80 billion cubic meters, has the potential to export up to 65 billion cubic meters of gas by 2050 with the right investments.[7] Türkiyes integration of new supply routes consolidates its status as a trade hub. The energy diversification strategy increases Türkiyes influence as well as energy security in regional and global markets. Moreover, the transmission of Turkmen natural gas to Türkiye via Iran does not require additional costs as it will be realized through the existing pipeline infrastructure. In this context, the goal of increasing gas storage capacity will also strengthen Türkiyes role as a key player in regional energy trade.[8]

This initiative between Türkiye and Turkmenistan dates back to the 1990s. In 1997, Türkiye, Turkmenistan, and Iran signed an agreement on the extension of the Turkish-Iranian pipeline to Turkmenistan. Another important initiative is the Trans-Caspian Gas Pipeline Project, which aims to transport gas from Turkmenistan across the Caspian Sea to Türkiye and Europe. According to the agreement signed on 29 October 1998, 30 billion cubic meters of gas will be transported to Türkiye, of which 16 billion cubic meters will be utilized in the Turkish domestic market and the rest will go to Europe. In May 1999, Türkiye and Turkmenistan agreed to build the Trans-Caspian Gas Pipeline to transport Turkmen gas to Europe via Türkiye. However, this project could not be realized due to the disputed status of the Caspian Sea and disputes between Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan over the rights to Caspian energy resources.[9]

Türkiye has had the fastest growing energy demand among the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries in the last 20 years. Located in a region neighboring approximately %60 of the world's oil and natural gas reserves, Türkiye has become one of the largest energy markets in its region. The country aims to contribute to regional and global energy security and to become a regional trade center in energy.[10] It is a natural energy corridor due to its particular geographical location between energy supplying and energy demanding regions and its historical ties with both East and West. After the Russia-Ukraine War, Türkiyes significance in this regard has increased even more.

Türkiye is seen as an actor that places energy diplomacy at the center of interstate

relations. Due to its geographical location, proximity to energy resources, and being a transit country, it plays an influential role in regional energy balances. Within the framework of this diplomatic approach, Türkiye aims to ensure energy supply security and support regional stability. In this direction, the country is building closer relations with neighboring countries by increasing regional cooperation and thus encouraging regional economic growth. Türkiyes ability to provide a secure supply of energy resources, its position as a transit country, its regional energy projects, and its strong diplomatic relations have made the country a regional power.[11] Türkiye serves as a transit bridge between Middle Eastern and Caspian exporters and importers. Additionally, the countrys strategy of becoming a regional energy hub, which views Central Asian and Caucasian countries as exporters, is the best option to replace Russia's dominant position in the European market.[12]

Overall, Türkiyes energy diplomacy will continue to enhance energy supply security, create opportunities for economic cooperation, and contribute to regional power dynamics. The natural gas cooperation with Turkmenistan has reinforced Türkiyes role as a regional energy hub by increasing the diversification of energy sources. The countrys investments within the framework of this goal are critical in increasing energy supply security and reducing energy dependency. Türkiye is expected to continue strengthening regional cooperation in this direction.

**Photo: BOTAŞ*

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About the Author :

Bekir Caner ŞAFAK graduated from the Department of Political Science and Public Administration of Ankara University's Faculty of Political Sciences in 2022. He received his Master's Degree from Institute of Social Sciences of Ankara University, Department of Political Science in 2025 with his thesis titled "Liberalism - Democracy Tension: Antagonistic and Agonistic Politics Versus Representative Politics". He is currently a Ph.D. Candidate in Political Science at Ankara University.

During his undergraduate education, he interned at AVİM (2021), the Ministry of the Interior of Türkiye (2021), and the Governorship of Ankara (2022); and after graduating, he interned at a private company in Helsinki, Finland within the framework of the Erasmus+ program.

Şafak has been a Scholar in Residence at AVİM since December 2024.

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Süleyman Nazif Sok. No: 12/B Daire 3-4 06550 Çankaya-ANKARA / TÜRKİYE
Tel: +90 (312) 438 50 23-24 • **Fax**: +90 (312) 438 50 26
@avimorgtr
https://www.facebook.com/avrasyaincelemelerimerkezi
E-Mail: info@avim.org.tr
http://avim.org.tr

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