



The University of Tehran Press

Journal of Iran and Regional Studies

Home Page: <https://ijces.ut.ac.ir>

Online ISSN: 2645-6060

EU's "Greening Mission": EU's Neo-Colonial Energy Policy in the Southern Mediterranean Region

Rajdeep Singh¹ | Ali Sabbaghian^{2*}

1. PhD Student of Regional Studies, Department of Regional Studies; Faculty of Law and Political Science, University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran. Email: rajdeep.singh@ut.ac.ir

2. Corresponding Author, Assistant Professor, Department of Regional Studies; Faculty of Law and Political Science, University of Tehran, Tehran; Iran. Email: sabbaghian@ut.ac.ir

ARTICLE INFO

Article type:
Research Article

Article History:

Received 07 June 2024

Revised 17 February 2025

Accepted 23 February 2025

Published Online 23 February 2025

Keywords:

EU,
Electricity grid,
Connectivity,
Gas pipelines,
Mediterranean,
Energy policy,
EUlectrification.

ABSTRACT

The EU has embraced the power of renewables. Considering the EU's poor energy resources, it seems only natural that the EU strives for closer energy ties with the energy-rich Southern and Eastern Mediterranean Countries (SEMCs). Despite the discovery of relatively large gas fields in the South Eastern Mediterranean shores, there has been relatively less emphasis and financial support from EU on building new gas pipelines and a clear shift in EU policy to instead fund exploitation of renewable energy resources in SEMCs. It is more striking post Russia's invasion of Ukraine and EU's urgent need to find new energy supplies. Therefore, the main research question is as follows: How has the EU's renewable policy affected the development of gas network between the EU and SEMCs? To answer the above question, it is hypothesized that EU's renewable policy, with electricity and grid connectivity at its heart, has resulted in energy policy shift to renewables at the cost of new gas pipelines. The theoretical framework draws from Kalypso Nicolaidis's neo-colonialism. Considering the research question and the nature of the data, we employed the critical discourse analysis as the method approach. The research findings show that EU has expanded the European universalism to the energy domain, effectively guiding the non-European countries on the southern shores of the Mediterranean Sea to a transition of energy based on its own "needs" and "image", leading to the "Greening Mission" and "EUlectrification".

Cite this article: Singh, R. & Sabbaghian, A. (2025). EU's "Greening Mission": EU's Neo-Colonial Energy Policy in the Southern Mediterranean Region. *Journal of Iran and Regional Studies*, 7 (2), 133-146. DOI: <http://doi.org/10.22059/ijces.2025.377685.1070>



© Rajdeep Singh, Ali Sabbaghian

DOI: <http://doi.org/10.22059/ijces.2025.377685.1070>

Publisher: University of Tehran Press.

1. Introduction

With the Russia's invasion of Ukraine, EU's high dependence on energy import has become a security challenge for the EU. Lacking sufficient energy resources, it seems only natural that the EU strives for closer energy ties with the energy-rich Southern and Eastern Mediterranean Countries (SEMCs). Moreover, the discovery of relatively large gas fields in the South Eastern Mediterranean shores has attracted many EU firms in the exploration and development of gas energy infrastructure. Considering the EU's energy policies and the EU's neighborhood policy toward the South, a gradual shift from Russian to the Mediterranean gas pipelines looks imminent. The EU's focus on market-regulatory harmonization and the wider Mediterranean region seems further support the rapid development of natural gas infrastructure in the Southern shores of the Mediterranean Sea. However, the developments in the expansion of gas pipelines have been remarkably low, even post Russia's invasion of Ukraine and EU's urgent need to find new energy supplies. On the other hand, the EU has been pushing for renewables and completing its internal energy market. Therefore, the main research question is as follows: How the EU's renewable policy has affected the development of gas network between the EU and SEMCs. To answer the above question, it is hypothesized that EU's renewable policy, with electricity and grid connectivity at its heart, has resulted in energy policy shift to renewables at the cost of new gas pipelines.

2. Literature Review

An expanding body of academic literature has been focused on energy dynamics in Eastern Mediterranean region. Some look into the EU's response to the discovery of energy resources, while others investigate the regional security dynamics and the gas pipeline politics in EU's immediate neighborhood of the Mediterranean Sea. In "Thinking energy outside the frame? Reframing and misframing in Euro-Mediterranean energy relations," Anna Herranz-Surrallés (2018) investigates the EU's initial reaction to the Arab uprisings in the field of energy cooperation. In the study Harranz Surrallés analyzes the policy frame underpinning the EU's persistent focus on market-regulatory harmonization since the late 1990s. Additionally it is argued that while the dominant framing is of market-liberal one, a host of reframing claims, driven by cognitive dissonance with context, and misframing claims, driven by challenges to the exclusionary character of dominant frames on the part of EU's practical engagement with the region is observable, signifying the partly erosion of the initial neoliberal agenda in the energy sector (Herranz-Surrallés, 2018). In "Energy security in the Eastern Mediterranean," A. Prontera and M. Ruszel similarly investigated the current situation of Eastern Mediterranean gas development and its geopolitical and geoeconomic implications by studying the interaction between markets and political and security dynamics in the gas sector. It was argued that further the geopolitical interests of the Eastern Mediterranean countries are bound to affect geoeconomic decisions. It also further concluded that the emerging cooperation among Tel Aviv, Nicosia and Athens, and the increased Israel's influence on its neighbors, in addition to the political and economic competition for their monetization by major external players affects the regional energy security dynamics (Prontera & Ruszel, 2017). In "energy security in the Eastern Mediterranean," A. Stergiou investigates large-scale discoveries of energy resources offshore Israel, Cyprus and Egypt since 2009 and its implication for the regional security. It is argued that so far mutual felt threat has determined the East Mediterranean countries' behavior with respect to the gas discovery in the region. It concludes that considering deep-rooted ethnical and political conflicts as well as economic viability of the confirmed reserves, the current energy discoveries will not affect in significant way the energy security for both regional and non-regional actors (Stergiou, 2017). Meanwhile in a more recent study titled "a geopolitical account of the Eastern Mediterranean conundrum: sovereignty, balance of power

and energy security considerations," F. Proedrou similarly investigates, through a geopolitical lens, the evolving tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean. It is argued that energy exploration schemes and pipeline politics are shaped and driven by factors such as sovereignty, balance of power and energy security concerns. It concludes that the discovery of new gas deposits in the Eastern Mediterranean has enhanced geopolitical competition among Turkey, Greece and Egypt with notions of sovereignty and has formed alliances against Turkey. It concludes that EU affected by Russia's geopolitical assertiveness is vigorously backing up gas schemes in the Eastern Mediterranean (Proedrou, 2023).

3. Research Methodology

In this study, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) was selected as the research method to investigate the central research question. CDA is primarily concerned with how language and its signs are embedded within a social context, considering the effects of word choice and the power relations inherent within them. Discourse, in essence, refers to the capacity of meaning-making resources to constitute social reality, identity, and forms of knowledge within specific social contexts and power relations (Chouliaraki, 2008). A discourse analytic approach to qualitative research is based on the understanding that language and thought are intrinsically linked, with language producing different versions of reality through codes and conventions embedded in a particular context. Specifically, CDA examines how power is legitimized and reproduced through the discourse of dominant groups (Chouliaraki, 2008). In that sense, the focus of the study will be on gathering documents, in particular reports published by the EU Commission, envision as sustainable development as well as the way list of priority project goes hand in hand in shaping energy policy in former colonies in the southern Mediterranean sea; what they understood as the opportunity to exploit former Colonies of European powers, and more importantly how the documents fathom the differentiation between the two shores of the southern Mediterranean Sea

4. Conceptual Framework: Neo-Colonialism Theory

In order to investigate the EU relations with the Southern Mediterranean states Kalypso Nicolaïdis's neo-colonialism theoretical framework was selected. The very construction of the European Economic Community was built upon ideas promoted by Eurafrica projects, which Nkrumah later called "collective colonialism" (Nicolaïdis, 2009: 4). An attempt to institutionalizing Franco-British colonial cooperation, Eurafrica project was meant to pool sovereignty in order to pool colonies, that overseas territories were to be integrated with all the European countries, not just a few. In other words, it was a project of the distribution of colonial profits and burden sharing. Later on, with the difficulty to hold up the colonial territories, French came with the idea of decolonization as an inevitable export of French revolution ideas of *liberté égalité fraternité* to the colonies, a rather cynic liberal narrative of progress (Nicolaïdis, 2009). As Nicolaïdis points out the construction of European Community (EC) was the product of a mixed strategy of amnesia (selective forgetting of the colonial past), redirection (an internal civilizing mission for French and others), and atonement (the apparent enthusiasm for aid policy toward the former colonies) on the part of "public figures, intellectuals and the various actors of foreign policy" (Nicolaïdis, 2009: 7). However, this European project was again imbued in the old mentality of Europeans to see themselves as the better ones, belonging to a superior civilization, resulting in the proselytizing zeal of Europeans of their own new found model. Therefore, the EC, later baptized as the European Union (EU) by the Maastricht treaty, gave birth to the EU universalism in which there is a unidirectional universalism (contradictory in essence) follows from the EU to the rest of world. This European universalism is rather reinforced by the tendency of exceptionalism. After all, the nature of universalism

always relates to the eye of the beholder, thus provokes a layer of exceptionalism with it. The norms, values, standards and whatever European finds to be universal will be proselytized to the rest of barbaric non-European world. In its strong form, the very definition of Europe, its “soul” and “enlightenment inheritance”, derives from standards and values, with amnesia regarding the colonial past, which should actively be promoted by Europe as an actor in its own right; the weak version restricts Europeans to be the uniquely placed to promote and proselytize whatever is deemed universally acceptable values, with a clear arbitration by the European masters. This EUniversalism, or European universalism, is accompanied by exceptionalism. Likened to the civilizing mission that once European colonizers were pursuing in the non-European world, the EU seeks to not only promote its standards and values in the context of its interaction with individual countries, candidates for membership or otherwise, but also with regional groupings such as Mercosur, Arab Maghreb Union, the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) signed with the ACP countries, as well as with global organizations such as the ISO, the FAO or even the WTO (Nicolaïdis, 2009: 12).

Naturally, the problem is that these so called EUropean values promoted as universal values are to safeguard European interests; they are just cosmetic arrangements for the wild European interests. What Europeans follow in practice in words of Nkrumah (1965) is that though the states subject to European values and standards, through positive and negative conditionality, are independent in theory, and have all the outward trappings of international sovereignty, in reality, “their economic system and thus their political policy” is directed by Europeans once again (Langan & Price, 2020: 6). Europeans entice former colonies and deride their independence, with direct payments, in the guise of preferential access to EU markets or international development aid, in order to control over government policy in the neo-colonial state (independent in theory) and dictate policy (Langan & Price, 2020: 7). Thus, Europeans promote and impose the EU model and its negotiated sovereignty on their ex colonies, arguing the interdependence is a much better fate than independence, even if could only be asymmetric. In other words, the Europeans turned the table, moving from the promotion of a Westphalian, non-interference type of sovereignty (for Europeans) to conditional one (deficient as always only for non-Europeans) to the negotiated sovereignty (for everyone) of course within the same asymmetric power and wealth dynamics. Thus, the overall EU patterns of neo-colonialism can be summarized in the Table1.

Table 1. EU and its relations with the South and Eastern Mediterranean States

EU-introduced Concepts	Instances
EUniversalism	EUropean Values-Standards
Exceptionalism	EU as standard-setter
Interdependence	Ex colonies as the receiver of EU standards
Funding	EU the net donor and ex colonies as net receiver
Negotiated Sovereignty	Duplication of asymmetric relations

Source: Author(s)' adaptation from (Nicolaïdis, 2009)

5. Energy Investment in the Eastern Mediterranean Region

Since 1995 with the beginning of the so-called Barcelona Process, European powers have expanded their links with their former colonies in the Southern Mediterranean shores through a series of free trade agreements (EFTAs), association agreements (AAs). Though mostly geared toward facilitating trade, it creates interdependence among the EU's peripheries and its core. Even after transforming to the Union for Mediterranean (UfM), the latter is regarded as a continuation of the Barcelona Process. While the EU lacks a harmonized energy landscape, it is pursuing the neoliberal agenda in the construction of EU's Internal Energy Market (IEM) and externalizes the EU energy aquis to the wider Mediterranean region. In fact, the EU commission is pushing for a harmonized and interconnected internal market for gas, a task that has become

more urgent in the wake of Russia's aggressive posture in the South Caucasus and Eastern Europe. A "moving target" approach with proactive role for the Commission and EU financial institutions, and the diverging preferences among Member States have resulted in the slow progress of the transition process toward a truly harmonized IEM (Prontera, 2018). Having said that, the push to liberalize energy market and integration in the energy front, intensified since 2006, gearing towards energy market liberalization and integration, has created constraint on the options available to domestic policy makers. While integration and creation of integral market for all goods, including energy, has been on the European agenda, the different nature of energy market, gas in particular, has led to two divergent logics among EU Member states: The market liberal perspective and the realist logic; national gas monopolies, long established as a response to energy shocks is in contrast with the market liberal perspective which calls on the progressive liberalization process of the energy markets championed by European institutions in order to clear level playing field in the gas market, open to competition, discriminating between activities in which competition is possible and others characterized by monopolies (Rubino, 2021). Interestingly, at the EU level, there are opposing interests among the EU member states; the southern, less competitive countries prefer a model based on giant national champions in the gas sector as such monopolies help governments remain active in market and the political economy. On the other hand, the EU supported by influential sectors in the northern countries favors the liberal market perspective, emphasizing the benefits larger competition brings for the consumers. The national logic is further supported by the reality of gas and energy market, namely, fluctuating demand side and volatile international regime of energy. Despite the mentioned bifurcation of logics, the liberalization logic has important takers among multinational enterprises (MNEs); this has helped the EU policy-makers to get on board the unbundling process, separating the different activities undertaken by formerly integrated firms, transforming existing monopolies into firms competing for market shares, while geopolitical shocks have only contributed to strengthening the construction of IEM through integrating the EU gas market. Unbundling is the separation of energy supply and generation from the operation of transmission networks and can take place in one of three ways, depending on the preferences of individual EU countries: i) ownership unbundling - all energy companies sell off their gas and electricity networks and no supply or production company is allowed to hold a majority share or interfere in the work of a transmission system operator; ii) independent system operator – though energy supply companies may formally own gas or electricity transmission networks but the entire operation, maintenance, and investment in the grid should be commissioned to an independent company; iii) independent transmission system operator-through subsidiary, fully independent in decision-making, energy supply companies may still own and operate gas or electricity networks (Third Energy Package, 2023). Furthermore, independent regulators should be designated by each member state as to ensure the application of the rules and they will be a party to the Agency for the Cooperation of Energy Regulators (ACER) in order to help the different national regulators, cooperate and ensure the smooth functioning of the internal energy market (Third Energy Package, 2023).

Despite EU efforts, the traditional vertically integrated model is still widespread in different countries and regions. Relatedly, the EU's liberal market agenda has provided the energy giants of the south easier access to the energy resources of the Mediterranean Partners (MPs); while there is an increasing competition inside the EU internal market with the creation of IEM, the energy giants have been left with a breathing space in the South through the externalization of EU gas policies and different energy forums there, opening market for them through in particular the promotion of market liberalization and ownership unbundling. Furthermore, European energy giants are the most active in the gas exploration in the eastern Mediterranean Sea. Hydrocarbon resources in the Eastern Mediterranean are moderate in global terms, if

significant on a regional scale. Despite a range of disputes in the region, from civil war in Syria to Lebanon-Israel and Cyprus-Turkey disputes, many European companies are already investing in gas exploration and production (see Figure1).

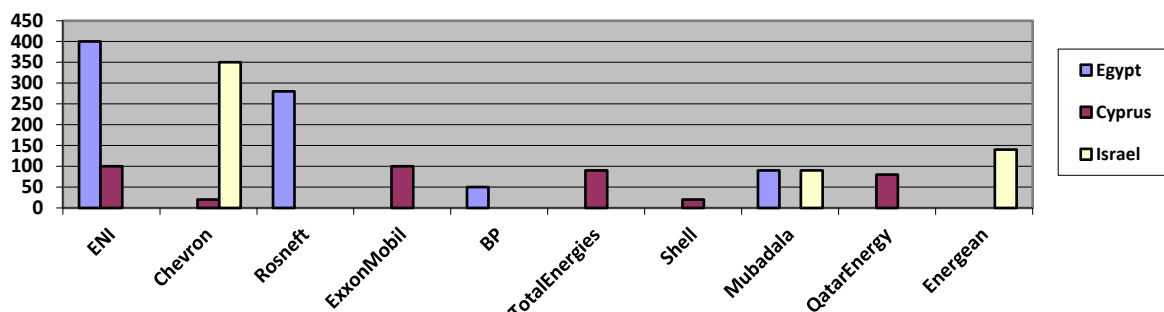


Fig. 1. Discovered gas resources in Eastern Mediterranean countries by foreign companies, as of November 2022 in Billion Cubic Meters (Nie & Mills: 2023: 42)

In Lebanon, the European duo, French TotalEnergies and Italian ENI, began exploration and operation as of 2023. Furthermore, there are Arab companies of the Persian Gulf such as Mubadala (from UAE) and QatarEnergy (from Qatar) that are actively seeking to invest in the gas field. Among the SEMCs, Israel stands out for following characteristics in its gas exploration field: significant number of local Israeli companies involved (Isramco, Newmed Energy, Ratio, Tamar Petroleum); diverse range of foreign companies from Arab to British to American companies; absence of companies from the EU (neither French nor Italian). It is of significant that Israeli market seems closed to EU companies, while open to its ally the U.S. and the UAE which normalized its relations with Israel. The critical view of EU toward Israel and its human-rights record (though mostly rhetorical) along with pro-Arab leanings of France and Italy seem to have played against the EU companies in this case. Looking at companies active in the operation of gas field, Italian ENI and American Chevron stand out (see Figure 2).

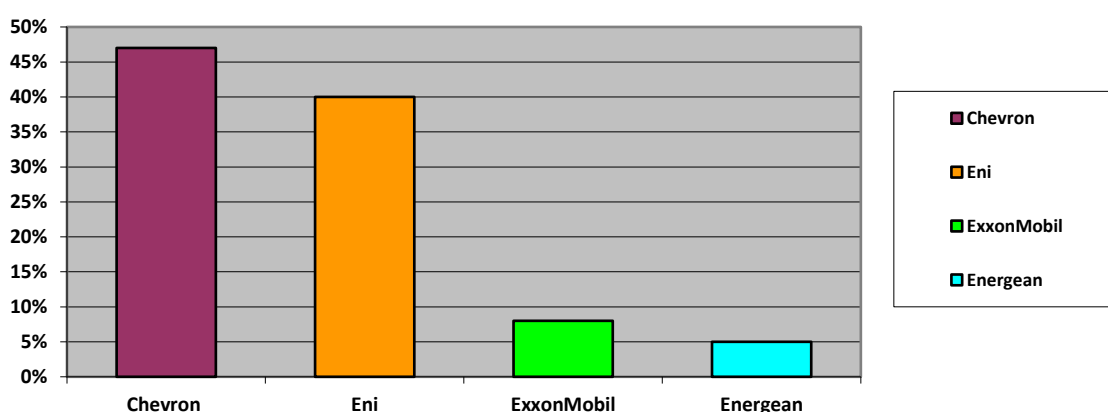


Fig. 2. Operated gas fields by volume (Nie & Mills: 2023: 43)

For now, the Egyptian and Israeli gas field production are operational. Considering the high gas consumption in Egypt, and the sour relations between Cyprus and Turkey due to their economic zone disputes and low internal gas consumption in Israel, some advocated a vision to

connect SEMCs gas from Israel to Italy. EastMed pipeline, a 1,900–2,000 km (1,400 km offshore; 600 km onshore) gas pipeline from Israel through Cyprus, to Crete, mainland Greece, and potentially southeast Europe (via the new Greece-Bulgaria interconnector) or Italy (via the Trans-Adriatic Pipeline). The Mediterranean pipeline is still being developed by IGI Poseidon, a joint venture of DEPA (Greece) and Edison (Italy) with approximate cost of €6 billion (Tsakiris, 2018). The EU is also influencing the politics of the Mediterranean Sea through its projects of common interest and Connecting Europe Fund as a special vehicle of funding such projects. Having one project included in the EU's list of projects of common interest, therefore, would be regarded as being preferred compared to alternative ones. Similarly, interconnecting electricity grids between Crete (in Greece), Cyprus and Israel (known as EurAsia Electricity Interconnector) and EastMed Gas pipeline are both included in the list of projects of common interest, which means they receive funding from EU (Commission Delegated Regulation, 2022).

In January 2019, under the leadership of Italy and Greece, the East Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF, or EGF) was established. Republic of Cyprus, Egypt, Greece, Israel, Italy, Jordan, and the Palestinian Authority, besides Italy and Greece, are members of EMGF (Sartori & Bianchi, 2019). Declared goal of EMGF, subsequently joined by France, is promotion of regional collaboration not only among Eastern Mediterranean countries but also with Europe. Furthermore, the LNG plants in Egypt are also providing the EU with natural gas. There is a plan to make Egypt the LNG hub, through linking the two existing underutilized LNG plants, in Egypt to the Israel-Cypriot gas fields (Nie & Mills: 2023).

Beyond direct European energy enterprises in the Mediterranean region, the EU has also formed a vast Euro-Mediterranean energy regulatory network. MedTSO and MedReg are two important EU platforms to expand EU's internal energy policy to its periphery in the southern shores of the Mediterranean Sea. The first tackles the issue of grid and gas connectivity directly linked to transmission system operators which are mostly subsidiary companies of the main energy producing enterprises, possibly leading to the conflict of interests (Bianchi et al., 2018); it includes gas and electricity transmission system operators from 19 Mediterranean countries, and has the mission to facilitate system integration between the two shores of the Mediterranean Sea (Bianchi et al., 2018). In fact, the EU is engaging the MPs to integrate EU acquis on the energy market through funding different interconnection infrastructures under the Mediterranean Project initiative. On the other hand, MedReg defines her mission as supporting energy regulators to move towards solid regulation models by promoting a common, integrated and independent regulatory culture. However, the reality is that the EU through know-how exchange and detailed reports based on level of independence, competences, organization, enforcement, transparency and accountability is setting its own energy standards on the former colonies (Bianchi et al., 2018). In fact, The EU has been a continuous promoter of MedReg since its creation with the Directorate General for Neighborhood and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR) co-financing MedReg activities. Workshops with themes such as renewable energy integration, energy efficiency, cross-border interconnections, and regulatory harmonization are frequent (MEDREG Institutional, 2023). Implementing regulatory frameworks for sustainable energy systems and seeking progressive market integration in the Euro-Mediterranean region are the hallmark of Medreg which points toward the EU model being promoted in the former colonies. MEDREG activities range from developing recommendations and concrete roadmap to Jordan to improve its electricity licensing procedures to organizing workshop in Algeria with recommendations regarding the price setting in renewable energy auctions (empowering Mediterranean regulators, 2023).

6. EU's Green Deal and Gas Directive Turn

Europeans have pressed the MPs to accept the EU renewable energy guidelines and the EU Green Deal indirectly through positive conditionality, i.e. more access to EU fund and market for policy compliant countries. The European Green Deal, proposed on 2019, has the main goal of transforming the EU into a modern, resource-efficient and competitive economy, ensuring that an inclusive economic growth is accompanied by the zero net emissions of greenhouse gases by 2050 which is known as climate neutrality status (The European Green Deal, 2023). The EU in reality has come up with a three pillar structure to achieve the above mentioned goal comprising: renewable energy sources, energy efficiency and reduction of the greenhouse gas (GHG) (Hafner & Raimondi, 2020). The most important between them is the renewable energy resources which would be translated for the EU to huge investments in the EU internal market as well as its southern neighborhood in the Mediterranean region. Nevertheless, since energy policy is a "shared competence" between the EU institutions and Member States, member states have considerable maneuvering space to achieve the climate neutrality status. Though Europeans themselves have different social and economic preoccupations when it comes to energy transition, they indeed promote their model in their former colonies.

Just as the EU is developing the EU green energy model, it has also redirected the resources inside the EU. In fact, the EU has slowly moved to externalize EU internal gas market regulation beyond the land masses to waters of EU member states. Following Russia's proposed Nord Stream 2, the Commission stepped in, opposing it and in June 2017 requested a mandate from the Council of the EU to negotiate an agreement with Russia based on EU third Energy Package concerning the operation of Nord Stream 2 following Russia disputing the EU competencies in the matter and discrimination leveled against and singling out Russian companies. In fact, Russia had previously accused the EU of the non-discrimination principles enshrined in multilateral trade and energy governance using the energy legislation, connecting national gas network, to pursue political aims which had ended in a win for Russia as in 2018 a panel established by the Dispute Settlement Body of the World Trade Organization (WTO) upon Russia's request ruled that the EU was discriminating against Russian gas projects (Siddi & Kustova, 2021). However, the commission backed up its claim by claiming that, following the introduction of the Third Energy Package in 2009, its regulations concerning ownership unbundling and third party access is not anymore limited to the EU territory, but also to the territorial waters of EU member states. Faced with the legal uncertainty due to differing opinion in the legal service of the council, the Commission proposed to amend the Gas Directive to reflect the mentioned point which resulted in the amended Gas Directive applicable to EU territorial waters, with the concerned member state where the pipeline first lands left to issue exemptions only in agreement and coordination with European Commission (Siddi & Kustova, 2021: 1088). Thanks to the amended Gas Directive, candidate countries wishing either to become gas hub or exporting their gas to the EU through third countries need to make tangible reforms including liberalizing prices and privatizing their energy landscape, unbundling ownership, and allowing third party access (competitive market). However, maybe more important is that the EU is on the "Greening mission" in which electricity import against gas pipeline project stand out.

Though not explicitly mentioning it, considering the overall EU push for renewables and Green Deal, it effectively closes the door to new gas pipeline project. It also serves the redirection for French as the French interests lie in their control of German leanings toward Russia and Eastern Europe, led by their historic Ostpolitik. This also directly affects the future of the Mediterranean gas project. In fact, the amended Gas Directive has important consequences for South and Eastern Mediterranean Countries (SEMCs): i) competition in energy market (along with third party access) is the condition for SEMCs in order to export gas

to the EU; ii) liberalization and ownership unbundling in particular is the second condition now imposed on SEMCs for gas export; iii) external management of gas network is now an exclusive EU competence; iv) the European Commission would weigh gas against renewable energy for any future gas pipeline authorization. Therefore, the EU is now commanding significant influence on the energy market in the SEMCs as any potential plan for gas and energy export to the EU requires adaptation to EU Gas Directive. Considering the discovery of significant gas resources and the low level of liberalization and ownership unbundling in Eastern Mediterranean region, the EU policy push SEMCs to open up their market for the participation of EU energy giants, and to liberalize the energy prices, a highly political sensitive issue considering the popular opposition.

Almost all of the energy networks in the Southern shores of the Mediterranean Sea are being directed toward the EU. Thus, EU will have the upper hand in price setting due to the resultant competition among SEMCs to export their energy resources to the EU. In Libya, for example, both France and Italy pursue cooperation and support opposing warring factions in reserves in order to control the oil terminals in the so-called Oil Crescent, East Libya. Consequently, France and Italy by militarily engaging in Libya are leading efforts to control and direct energy resources in the South toward the EU.

7. EU's "Greening Mission" and "EUlectrification"

Given the EU's third energy package, it would be preferable to opt for infrastructure, designed for transfer of hydrogen, rather than repurposing existing gas pipelines. In fact, the chief of European Commission has called the hydrogen "a game changer for Europe" and has called member states to develop hydrogen economy (State of the Union Address, 2022: 7-8). Within REPowerEU, the Commission has doubled its 2030 target for the production of renewable hydrogen in the EU; Commission also has put in place the European Hydrogen Bank, which will act as a market maker for hydrogen so as to bridge the investment gap, and to guarantee the purchase of hydrogen, notably by using resources from the Innovation Fund (State of the Union Address, 2022: 8). The same considerations have led Spain and France to reach an agreement for the construction of a pipeline in the western Mediterranean exclusively dedicated to hydrogen. In fact, under the recovery plan for French industry "France 2030", French President Emanuel Macron announced putting 1.9 billion euros on the table in order to deploy a hydrogen-based initiative, and to support an emerging sector. This will be added to already 7 billion euros dedicated to hydrogen announced in 2020 via the recovery plan, the aim of which was to support low-carbon production and democratization of this gas (Godelier, 2021). Furthermore, though Spain and its energy giants such as Repsol have been mostly absent in the gas sector in Eastern Mediterranean Sea, it is in the hydrogen that Spain sees the future of becoming the European hub for energy. Spain has become the most ardent supporter of the European Commission to revolutionize the EU energy market through the use of low-carbon hydrogen. In fact, Spain, France and Portugal, intend to build the first green corridor of hydrogen through the repurposing the existing gas networks, to which Germany has also joined (Page, 2023). The hydrogen project, called H2Med aims to replace natural gas in economic sectors that find it difficult or impossible to electrify (Page, 2023). The whole shift toward hydrogen is under the European Green Deal. In fact, the shift toward hydrogen also carries along the shift toward electricity grid connectivity. Since Hydrogen is a by-product of the renewable energies, it can be converted to electricity and be exported to the EU through the solar-rich Southern Mediterranean shores. Thus, we are witnessing the beginning of the new mission, the "Greening Mission", similar to old familiar "Civilizing mission". Here, Europeans prepare non-Europeans for the energy transition through "their own policies" and "choices". It is rather a unidirectional imposition of best practices Europeans find would be better for the

rest of the world. While Europeans themselves have disputes even regarding the type of hydrogen classified as clean and low-carbon (Page, 2023), the southern Mediterranean states have no say in the final outlook of EU energy policy, though it directly affect them. For many Southern Mediterranean states which face worsening drought in North Africa, solar projects and hydrogen hubs leading to the reduction in water resources will only affect negatively the life of locals, leading to migration and desertification. In fact, the EU has proposed the MedRing, a project for a Mediterranean electricity ring, which will constitute the governing framework for the relations of the EU Mediterranean countries with the Southern Mediterranean in the electricity field. Reinforcing existing and establishing new bidirectional electricity interconnections that cross and circle around the Mediterranean is the declared main aim (Schuetze, 2023). It will facilitate the expansion of renewables in the Southern Mediterranean, and provide the EU with energy security as well as regional energy control. Thus, the EU electricity connectivity project is nothing more than EUniversalism in the energy sector, much better to be dubbed "EUElectrification". Energy standards, only designed according to European needs and interests, then become universalized for non-Europeans to comply with. "EUElectrification" has the following features: i) inevitable geographical proximity; ii) EU choosing the eligibility of energy resources to be converted to electricity; iii) monopoly of EU consumption market. First, countries converting their gas or renewables to electricity will have no other customers than Europeans due to the geographical connectivity. While Sub-Saharan African in theory should be able to participate in such grid connectivity project, their fate is decided by the EU fund for such connectivity. In its strong version, the sources for the conversion to electricity for the export to the EU have to be from renewables. In its weak version, even the gas conversion to electricity can be exported. The EurAsia Electricity Interconnector is an evidence of such Greening mission. The Israeli gas simply converted to the electricity will be connected and exported to the EU grid.

In fact, the EU will become such a big monopoly market that African countries have to lower prices significantly only to be able to compete in a monopoly market. Secondly, it is only the EU that decides who is eligible for electricity export. The Southern states will have no power to bargain for their own interests. Already it is the MEDREG that draws guidelines on Third Party Access (TPA) to the Mediterranean gas networks and identifies the countries meeting satisfactory practices in areas such as market opening, unbundling, and the like (empowering Mediterranean regulators, 2023). The unidirectional EUniversalism here turns to become a unidirectional EUElectrification in which African and Middle Eastern countries have only to follow the rules set by the European masters.

Similarly the hydrogen resources considering their relation with renewables are seen as another tool to make the southern States more interdependent, and less dependent. That's why in the EMFG, the EU plans to implement a hydrogen corridor from Israel to Italy. Such enthusiasm for hydrogen connectivity can be identified in Dutch Frans Timmermans, vice-president of European commission, when he said "in my dreams, I would create a partnership with North Africa and we would help and store a huge capacity of solar energy in Africa and turn that energy into hydrogen and transport that hydrogen to Europe"(Toulemonde, 2021). Despite Africa having the highest renewable energy potential, the European plans may seem reasonable. However, these plans are not designed to solve the problems of North African nations. "Green hydrogen", i.e. hydrogen produced by splitting water with a carbon-free source of electricity via electrolysis would require big amount of water. In fact, every kg of hydrogen produced would require at least the minimum consumption of 9 kg water may end up at as high as 60 to 95 kg of water per kg of hydrogen, taking into account the entire demineralization process and the requirements for cooling water to run the electrolyzers (Woods et al., 2022: 1). It is important to note that North Africa is one of the regions where water stress is a growing

concern. Rather through land grabbing (for renewable park installations and solar parks) and the exploitation of scant water resources (for hydrogen hubs) in the region, Southern Mediterranean Countries will face dire environmental consequences of such export plans to the EU. While European companies would gain from exporting technology to the region, the locals will have to face the environmental consequences of an already fragile ecosystem.

Interestingly, the European neo-colonial design works in the direction of closing the door to and stopping migrants from the South, while opening the door to Southern states to export electricity to the North. Thus, the EU has effectively turned to hydrogen, the electricity and grid connectivity as the project of interest for the EU, connecting the Southern shores of the Mediterranean Sea to the EU. Such project has following advantages for the EU: i) compatibility with the EU Green Deal; ii) importing as well as exporting electricity; iii) imposing EU IEM and Green Deal on Southern Mediterranean Countries. In fact, with the EU's "Greening mission" it is once again the Europeans who civilize non-Europeans with regard to energy consumption and connectivity. While in the colonial era, non-Europeans had to adapt themselves with European ideals of governance and civilization and values, now former colonies have to adapt to European Green energy ideals and grid connectivity.

Interestingly, an inversion of the prior pattern has emerged: European countries, historically the largest producers of greenhouse gas emissions, are now being overshadowed by African nations, which have contributed the least to climate change. This shift positions African countries as champions of environmentally friendly policies. In fact, Europe exhibits a troubling pattern of amnesia regarding its colonial past and the environmental destruction it has caused, both of which are often disowned and forgotten.

After all, the irony is that Europeans seemingly only inherited the enlightenment, and not the climate polluting industries and colonialism. Thus, the only bargaining chip that, let's say, Algerians have with regard to the EU will be gone. While in gas pipeline projects, there is still some maneuvering room for gas exporting countries to put pressure on gas receivers, in the electricity grid connectivity, the EU will be an exporter of electricity to the South as well, having an extra tool to mold the behavior of Southern states in the image of its own, as their master once again. Besides, the conversion of gas to electricity is another by-product of EU's "Greening Mission". Here, not only the EU is not doing a thing to fight against climate change but becomes an arbiter to decide which project can be considered green enough to become eligible for the export to the EU.

Conclusion

This contribution investigated the EU's renewable energy policy and its impact on the energy strategies of Southern Mediterranean countries, particularly in relation to new gas pipelines and renewable energy initiatives. The central research question addressed was: How has the EU's renewable policy influenced the development of the gas network between the EU and Southern Mediterranean countries (SEMCs)? It was hypothesized that the EU's renewable policy, which prioritizes electricity generation and grid connectivity, has led to a significant shift towards renewable energy at the expense of new gas pipeline developments. The research findings support this hypothesis, revealing that the EU is effectively exporting its energy model to SEMCs.

Historically, European colonizers operated under a so-called "civilizing mission." In contrast, contemporary European initiatives, driven by collective amnesia regarding their colonial past, have given rise to what can be termed a "Greening Mission." This mission seeks to prepare non-European nations for an energy transition shaped by European policies and preferences. The findings indicate that this approach represents a unidirectional imposition of best practices deemed suitable by Europeans for their former colonies. For instance, the EU's

focus on hydrogen production in Africa highlights this one-sided strategy; North Africa, already grappling with severe water stress, is expected to allocate precious water resources for hydrogen production aimed at export to Europe. This expectation exacerbates existing challenges related to water scarcity. Moreover, large-scale solar parks established in North Africa to generate electricity for export to the EU may lead to land grabbing and population displacement in certain instances. This situation introduces the concept of “EUElectrification,” which refers to the imposition of universal energy standards tailored exclusively to European needs and interests, compelling non-European countries to comply. The implications of “EUElectrification” are significant; it positions the EU as the arbiter of which energy resources qualify for conversion into electricity while simultaneously monopolizing the consumption market. Such dynamics are likely to deepen the economic dependency of Southern Mediterranean countries on Europe. In conclusion, it is evident that Europeans are perpetuating colonial patterns of exploitation within the energy sector, resulting in dire consequences for their former colonies. This modern-day exploitation not only undermines the sovereignty of these nations but also exacerbates existing socio-economic vulnerabilities, highlighting the urgent need for a more equitable and inclusive approach to global energy policy.

References

- Bianchi, M. et al. (2018). Assessing European energy and industrial policies and investments in the Southern Mediterranean region from a bottom-up perspective. *MEDRESET Policy Papers*, 34:1-25.
- Chouliaraki, L. (2008). Discourse analysis. In T. Bennett, J. Frow, & S. Sage (Eds.), *The sage handbook of cultural analysis*. Los Angeles: Sage. Available at: BritLibLink: <http://public.eblib.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=1024087>.

- Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) 2022/564 of 19 November 2021 amending Regulation (EU) No 347/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council as regards the Union list of projects of common interest. (2022). Europa. Available at <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32022R0564&qid=1663087079030> . Accessed on : 18 October 2023).
- Empowering Mediterranean regulators for a common energy future. (2023). Euneighbors. Available at <https://south.euneighbours.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/MEDREG-ENG.pdf> . Accessed on: 8 December 2023.
- Godelier, M. (2021). Hydrogène bas carbone : Macron ajoute 1,9 milliard d'euros pour soutenir la filière. La Tribune. Available at <https://www.latribune.fr/entreprises-finance/transitions-ecologiques/hydrogene-bas-carbone-macron-ajoute-1-9-milliard-d-euros-pour-soutenir-la-filiere-896548.html>. Accessed on: 18 October 2023. [In French].
- Hafner, M., & Raimondi, P. P. (2020). Priorities and challenges of the EU energy transition: From the European Green Package to the new Green Deal. *Russian Journal of Economics*, 6(4): 374-389.
- Herranz-Surrallés, A. (2018). Thinking energy outside the frame? Reframing and misframing in Euro-Mediterranean energy relations. *Mediterranean Politics*, 23(1): 122-141.
- Langan, M., & Price, S. (2020). Imperialisms past and present in EU economic relations with North Africa: Assessing the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements. *Interventions*, 22(6): 703-721.
- MEDREG Institutional. (2023). Medreg-regulators. Available at <https://www.medreg-regulators.org/Publications/Institutional.aspx> . Accessed on: 8 December 2023.
- Nicolaïdis, K. (2009). *Southern Barbarians: a Post-colonial Critique of EU Universalism*. IB Tauris.
- Nie, S., & Mills, R. (2023). Eastern Mediterranean Deepwater Gas to Europe: Not Too Little, But Perhaps Too Late. Center on Global Energy Policy. Available at https://www.energypolicy.columbia.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/East-Med-Gas-CGEP_Report_030923-2.pdf . Accessed on: 18 October 2023.
- Page, D. (2023). España y Francia se alían para reutilizar sus gasoductos para llevar hidrógeno. EPE. Available at <https://www.epe.es/es/activos/20230306/hidrogeno-espana-francia-portugal-gasoductos-84181151#:~:text=POR%20EL%20H2MED-Espa%C3%B1a%20y%20Francia%20se%20al%C3%ADan%20para%20reutilizar%20sus%20gasoductos%20para,Conductos%20de%20hidr%C3%B3geno%20verde>. Accessed on: 18 October 2023. [In Spanish].
- Proedrou, F. (2023). A geopolitical account of the Eastern Mediterranean conundrum: sovereignty, balance of power and energy security considerations. *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 36(5): 679-696.
- Prontera, A. (2018). The new politics of energy security and the rise of the catalytic state in southern Europe. *Journal of Public Policy*, 38(4): 511-551.
- Prontera, A., & Ruszel, M. (2017). Energy security in the Eastern Mediterranean. *Middle East Policy*, 24(3), 145-162.
- Rubino, A. (2021). The political economy of Euro-Mediterranean cooperation in the gas market: The role of domestic stakeholders and the European Commission. *Resources Policy*, 70, 101883.
- State of the Union Address by President von der Leyen. (2022). Europa. Available at https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/speech_22_5493. Accessed on: 18 October 2023.
- Siddi, M., & Kustova, I. (2021). From a liberal to a strategic actor: the evolution of the EU's approach to international energy governance. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 28(7): 1076-1094.
- Stergiou, A. (2017). Energy security in the Eastern Mediterranean. *International Journal of Global Energy Issues*, 40(5): 320-334.
- Sartori, N., & Bianchi, M. (2019). From Findings to Market: Perspectives and Challenges for the Development of Gas Resources in the East Med. *Rome, Istituto Affari Internazionali*.
- Schuetze, B. (2023). Follow the grid, follow the violence: the project for a transregional Mediterranean electricity ring. *Middle East Critique*, 1-19.
- Third Energy Package. (2023). Europa. Available at https://energy.ec.europa.eu/topics/markets-and-consumers/market-legislation/third-energy-package_en Accessed on: 16 October 2023.

- Tsakiris, T. (2018). The importance of East Mediterranean gas for EU energy security: The role of Cyprus, Israel and Egypt. *Cyprus Review*, 30(1): 25-50.
- The European Green Deal. (2023). *Europa*. Available at https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal_en. Accessed on: 8 December 2023.
- Toulemonde, M. (2021). Comment l'Union européenne veut faire du Maghreb son Eldorado de l'hydrogène. *Jeuneafrique*. Available at <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/1278610/economie-entreprises/comment-lunion-europeenne-veut-faire-du-maghreb-son-eldorado-de-lhydrogene/>. Accessed on :18 October 2023. [In French].
- Woods, P., et al. (2022). The hydrogen economy-Where is the water?. *Energy Nexus*, 7, 100123.