

East-Med in the News

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Energy and Environment

News – Mikati, Berri Assist in Launch of Oil Exploration in Lebanese Waters – Asharq Al-Aawsat

Lebanon's caretaker Prime Minister Najib Mikati and parliament Speaker Nabih Berri assisted on Tuesday in the launch of the logistics work for the oil and gas exploration in Lebanon's territorial waters, describing the day as a bright page in the country's history. Berri and Mikati toured the drilling platform, accompanied by Energy Minister Walid Fayad, Transport Minister Ali Hamie, a delegation from TotalEnergies company and the President of the Petroleum Sector Administration Authority, Wissam Zahabi. The delegation flew from Beirut's airport to the drilling platform in a TotalEnergies helicopter. They toured aboard the drilling rig to oversee the logistical aspects of oil and gas exploration in Block 9. "In this darkness comes a day of joy for which I have worked long years until the framework agreement was concluded," said Berri from the airport. He hoped that Lebanon's offshore wealth will start generating revenues within a few months and will mark the beginning of overcoming the economic crisis Lebanon and its people are enduring. Berri also hoped the Lebanese will reach an agreement over the election of a president. For his part, Mikati said he is hopeful that the coming days will bring promising signs to help Lebanon deal with its crises. "We hope that everybody will cooperate in the upcoming stage to revive our country and end the deterioration that we are witnessing on all levels," he said. "It is a day for the nation and a bright page in history," he added. TotalEnergies, Eni and QatarEnergy announced on Tuesday the launch of their exploration activities in Block 9.

News – Egypt's natural gas production declines and power cuts bite – Zawya

Egypt's natural gas production fell to a three-year low in the first five months of 2023, figures from the Joint Organisations Data Initiative (JODI) show, raising questions about the country's efforts to position itself as a regional energy hub. The country is grappling with power shortages as a heatwave has driven up demand for cooling. Gas production between January and May declined by 9% year-on-year and 12% when compared to the same period in 2021. Egypt, which faces growing demand for gas from its population of 105 million, has been seeking a regional supply role, selling its own gas and re-exporting Israeli gas as liquefied natural gas (LNG) to the Middle East, Africa and Europe. It received a boost from Italian company Eni's discovery of the giant Zohr gas field in 2015, and started importing from Israel in 2020. But there have been few large discoveries since, and a significant increase in supplies from Israel would only be possible after major infrastructure investment. Production at Zohr stands at 2.3 billion cubic feet per day (bcfd), the government said last month, down from 2.7bcfd in 2019.

News – Egypt announces new oil discovery in Gulf of Suez – Reuters

Egypt's petroleum ministry on Tuesday announced a new oil discovery in the Geisum and Tawila West Concession in the Gulf of Suez. The new discovery was made by Egypt's Cheiron through exploration well GNN-11, currently producing more than 2,500 barrels a day, the ministry said. The well is the fourth to be completed and another three wells could be drilled as part of the current phase of exploration, the ministry said.

News – Top 10 Developments in Libya's O&G Sector in 2023 – Energy Capital & Power

Libya's oil and gas sector is witnessing a revival as the socio-political environment stabilizes and the country pursues a large-scale expansion of its energy sector. Foreign players are being invited to seize the opportunities the largely untapped market presents while production at existing fields ramp up. In 2023 thus far, the country has seen several industry milestones that are poised to transform the country's economy on the back of oil and gas progress.

News – Amid Energy Crisis, Lebanon Sees First DrillShip Arrive For Oil Exploration – Oil Price

A looming gas crunch in Egypt is giving the impetus for Israel and Cyprus to advance projects and encourage upstream investments in the Eastern Mediterranean. Cyprus is afraid of being left behind as its 4.5 trillion cubic foot Aphrodite gas field remains undeveloped over a decade after it was discovered.

Meanwhile, nearby Israel is waiting for US major Chevron's decision on how it will move ahead with the second phase of the 22 Tcf Leviathan field. As a result, the new government of President Nikos Christodoulides in Cyprus is reaching out to international oil companies to press on with development and monetization plans for gas discoveries in Cypriot waters. Chevron is the operator of both Leviathan and Aphrodite, which has opened the possibility of linking up both Cypriot and Israeli fields, as new Cypriot Energy Minister George Papanastasiou has favored in recent media appearances. The major is due to announce its decision on an export option for Leviathan this month, with its partners preferring a floating LNG plant. Chevron holds a 39.66% stake in Leviathan, with NewMed holding 45.34% and Ratio Oil 15%.

Security Issues

News – Christodoulides pledges to redouble efforts to restart talks – Cyprus Mail

Representatives of occupied communities on Tuesday got a pledge from President Nikos Christodoulides that he will redouble efforts to jumpstart stalled Cyprus peace talks. A committee representing the occupied communities of Famagusta, Nicosia and Kyrenia met the president at the palace. Also present was Interior Minister Constantinos Ioannou. The topics discussed included restarting Cyprus talks, the refugees' loss of use of their property, the status of Turkish Cypriot properties in the south, and awareness campaigns drawing attention to the Cyprus issue. Committee chair and Flamoudi community leader Michalis Jiortas said the meeting took place "in the shadow of the Turkish side's latest provocations in Pyla, which worry the government". He added: "It is not the first time the Turkish side makes such provocations – be it about Famagusta, Trikomo, Karpasia and all other occupied areas. This time even the United Nations have sensed what difficulties they're up against, and I think that we need diplomacy to restart talks on the Cyprus problem."

News – Tensions in Cyprus amid Turkish Cypriot plans to build controversial road – Al-Monitor

The leader of Turkish Cyprus remained adamant that the unrecognized state will continue building a controversial road on the divided island after a tussle with United Nations peacekeepers. "We are determined to complete this road," Turkish Cypriot President Ersin Tatar told the Turkey's private television channel Haberturk on Friday. What happened: Turkish Cyprus is planning to build a road from the village of Arsos within its territory to the village of Pyla, located in the conflicted zone between Turkish and Greek Cyprus. Pyla is located just south of the 180-kilometer United Nations buffer zone where the island is split into the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus and the Republic of Cyprus. The UN Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus on Thursday condemned the work on the road. A spokesman for the force also said it would block construction by nonviolent means. The construction would encroach on the buffer zone and is opposed by the UN and the Republic of Cyprus, The Associated Press reported. On Friday, Turkish Cypriot forces "manhandled" UN peacekeepers, while Turkish Cypriot bulldozers moved UN trucks, cement structures and barbed wire in Sector 4 of UN zone. Three peacekeepers were seriously injured, but no shots were fired, Reuters reported.

News – Turkish Occupation Forces Conduct Contentious Exercises Near Libyan Coast – Libya Update

The Turkish occupation forces recently completed military exercises off the coast of Libya, according to the Turkish Ministry of Defense. The drills, which took place aboard the TCG Gemlik frigate as part of the Turkish Naval Task Group, included live-fire weapons tests, helicopter operations, vertical replenishment exercises, and boarding trainings. The exercises occur amid ongoing controversy over Turkey's military involvement in Libya. Analysts characterize the naval drills as a demonstration of force intended to assert Turkey's continued presence in the eastern Mediterranean as a key backer in Libya's complex civil war. The exercises have drawn criticism from opponents who see the activities as unlawful military posturing in foreign waters by occupation forces. According to international maritime law experts, while countries have a right to freely navigate open waters, conducting live-fire drills and other military operations off the coast of a foreign state is widely seen as provocative and contentious. By publicizing the drills, Turkey appears to be reinforcing its narrative of influence in the region. However, their actions continue to be perceived as an occupation by many Libyan groups and regional observers. The exercises exemplify the delicate military and geopolitical balances surrounding the ongoing conflict in Libya.

Opinion – Weighing the facts on the road to The Hague – Ekathimerini

During their recent meeting on the sidelines of the NATO summit at Vilnius, Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan appeared ready for a tentative rapprochement that may lead to a negotiation down the line. Even though such a prospect is still a long way away, the discussion has already started – with no shortage of passion and hyperbole. Taking a close look at the prospects for talks, there are three elements – related ones – that are key to any negotiation going forward: the terms and framework under which they will be conducted, the alternatives in the event that an agreement is not reached, and the timing. The question of timing, for example, refers both to which of the two sides is more pressed for a deal and also to the evolution of events that affect the dynamic between the two sides and would inevitably also influence their alternatives.

Analysis – Amid a long, hot summer, Israel finds itself in uncharted territory – Middle East Institute

It's been a long, hot summer in Israel, not only because of the multiple heat waves, but also due to the domestic political developments that have been heating up throughout 2023 and are now reaching a boiling point. With the Supreme Court gearing up to make highly consequential decisions in September and the Knesset in recess until mid-October, it is a good time to look back at all that Israel has gone through since the beginning of the year. For some on the Israeli right, it is a midsummer night's dream come true, but for a large number of Israelis, it seems like more of a nightmare.

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