



The Cambridge Security Initiative

## GAS, INFLUENCE SPUR RUSSIA'S EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN MEDIATION MOVE

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Dr Victor Madeira

Russia's offer [to mediate](#) between Cyprus/Greece and Turkey over eastern Mediterranean energy resources is about blocking rival gas projects and expanding influence along the European Union's (EU) and NATO's south flank. Turkey has long disputed Cypriot and Greek exclusive economic zones, partly over [122.4 trillion](#) cubic feet of offshore gas. The latest escalation includes Greek and Turkish [warships colliding](#) while the latter escorted survey ships in contested waters. Russia will seek a role in any Mediterranean crisis that freezes rival energy supplies to Europe and stokes unrest around it, keeping the EU and NATO divided and distracted. Specifically, Russia's mediation offer seeks expanded influence over Cyprus, Greece and Turkey, exploiting them while also seeking to [replace Germany](#) as the preferred intermediary.

Russian control of southeast Europe's gas flows is threatened by the proposed [EastMed pipeline](#) linking Israel, Cyprus, Greece and Italy; the [north-south corridor](#) linking Ukraine, Turkey and Greece along the Trans-Balkan pipeline; and western sanctions on the [TurkStream project](#), which links Russia to Turkey via the Black Sea and was intended to make the Trans-Balkan route obsolete. Cyprus's growing [strategic ties](#) with the United States also complicate matters: Russia has long regarded the island as its "backyard" due to [heavy investment](#) there, [much of it](#) the proceeds of crime. Citing fears of Turkish attack, Cyprus has convinced the U.S. to partially lift an arms embargo on the island for a year. [In exchange](#), Cyprus must target illicit Russian money with strict [anti-laundering](#) protocols and stop Russian warships from docking.

A day after the embargo lifted in early September, [Turkey announced](#) two Russian live-fire exercises in contested waters exactly where two Turkish survey ships had been illegally looking for gas deposits, in a likely gesture of solidarity. Despite publicly offering impartial mediation, [Russia encourages](#) any Turkish action that blocks competing gas projects. The [U.S. too](#) prefers that regional supplies do not take market share from American suppliers, towards which Turkey is moving at Russia's expense.

### OUTLOOK

Russia will look for any way to influence the eastern Mediterranean gas dispute, to control more European supply while undermining regional unity. If western sanctions stop TurkStream 2, and if sanctions following Russia's attempted assassination of [Alexei Navalny](#) drive Germany to cancel Nord Stream 2, the EU will ramp up efforts to diversify supply. If so, expect Russia to push its arc

of disruption further west along the Mediterranean [to Algeria](#)—a long-standing and reliable European supplier. Despite extensive commercial, defence and security ties between both countries, Russia has already carried out extensive disinformation operations against Algeria to discredit it as a reliable [energy supplier](#) in Europe's eyes.