New Discoveries of Natural Gas in the Mediterranean and its Impact on International Relations (Egypt, Lebanon, Israel, Palestine)*

Mona Farouk M. Ahmed**

Abstract

In the last decade, new discoveries of natural gas in the Mediterranean opened the way for predictions of its impacts on the international relations especially between Mediterranean countries. Many countries are involved in this issue whether by direct interest having a share of these discoveries or by indirect interest having the need for this gas. We can see countries; like Egypt and Israel are directly involved with these discoveries sharing the sea boundaries for gas fields. Some other counties are involved with this issue indirectly by being major consumers of natural gas and their needs of importing it.

The question is whether these discoveries would lead to disputes in the Mediterranean region or if it can be a peaceful tool to share the benefits of these natural gas discoveries. To answer this question, this paper will try to shed light on these discoveries and its impacts on the relationships of Mediterranean countries, focusing on four states that are directly involved with those discoveries.

Key words: Mediterranean, natural gas, discoveries, energy, relations

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** HK Assistant Professor, Institute for Mediterranean Studies, Busan University of Foreign Studies, e-mail: mona_farouk@yahoo.com.
Introduction

The Mediterranean area is one of the vital regions of the world with its geostrategic location and with its variety of countries that belong to Africa, Asia and Europe. The Mediterranean Sea has connected all these countries through sharing the treasures of the Mediterranean Sea. But would these resources be a reason of future disputes among those countries? Or would they be a reason for more cooperative relations to be formed in the future? Nowadays these questions are raised concerning new discoveries of natural gas in the Mediterranean Sea, as it is one of those resources with large quantities giving lots of hope for many countries to gain advantages. This includes the states having those natural gas fields within its borders, countries having the facilities and technology of exploring and working in this field, and countries that have a demand for natural gas.

Over the last decades, the Mediterranean region faced many changes including the formation of the European Union and several wars that led to a serious crisis of refugees. Additionally, we observe a continuous growth of the population in the region along with an increasing growth of the economic output as well. These changes contribute all to an increasing pressure on the Mediterranean natural resources which include natural gas as a main source of energy.

Natural gas is one of the most important sources for clean energy compared to other sources of fossil fuels, it also has more advantages than other fossil fuels like petroleum oil and coal, as it burns more cleanly than those fuels. It is known that burning natural gas produces only about half the carbon dioxide per kilowatt-hour (kWh) that coal does. Thus, natural gas has become one of the major sources of generating electricity (Naturalgas 2013).

Furthermore, both North America and Europe are major consumers of natural gas. This implies that other non-Mediterranean countries would have interests in these discoveries in the Mediterranean, as it may be a future provider of natural gas. Knowing that most countries of this region, especially the east of the Mediterranean, had suffered a lack of energy sources, can give us an idea about the importance of the recent discoveries of Mediterranean gas