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GEOENERGETIC POLICY OF TURKEY

At the beginning of the 2000s, Turkey launched significant reforms to liberalize its energy market, aiming to increase competitiveness and efficiency. However, although the regulatory framework was improved by the laws adopted during this period, the effectiveness of these reforms was questionable. Critics argue that these measures often remained theoretical, while the actual functioning of the energy market reflected a gap between legislation and practice. Despite a relatively sound legislative framework, the reforms remained at the level of theory. State-owned enterprises (SOEs) play a key role, and addressing their challenges is essential for achieving a functional Turkish energy market.

Turkey's early legislation and regulatory frameworks laid the key foundations for the country's energy policy. The initial legal structures established in the early decades of the 20th century were aimed at attracting foreign investments while ensuring state control over key resources. These frameworks were essential in directing the energy production and distribution infrastructure development, influencing economic growth. As energy demands increased, regulations had to adapt to promote sustainable investments and address environmental issues.

The historical development of Turkish energy policy was significantly shaped by the influence of foreign energy companies, which became crucial in the country's pursuit of energy security and economic

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growth. These companies attracted substantial foreign investments, enabling the transfer of technology and expertise vital for modernizing Turkey's energy infrastructure. As Turkey increasingly integrated into the global market, the implications of globalization and regional dynamics further complicated energy policy formation, affecting both local and international relations.

The consequences of the Second World War fundamentally restructured views on global energy security, which inevitably had its echo in Turkey. As European nations sought to recover from the war, there was a pronounced shift toward energy independence and diversification of energy sources. With the growing geopolitical tensions of the Cold War, Turkey recognized the need to secure reliable sources of energy to strengthen its national security and support economic growth.

Between 1950 and 1980, Turkey's energy policy marked a significant transition and liberalization, reflecting broader economic reforms (Hale 2013). After a severe balance-of-payments crisis, the Turkish government shifted from import-substitution strategies to an export-oriented approach to integrate the economy into global markets. At the same time, the Energy Market Regulatory Authority was established to oversee the liberalization of the energy sector – the restructuring aimed to create a competitive environment that could attract foreign investment and increase efficiency. However, the regulatory framework remained inadequate, burdened with widespread corruption and ineffective macroeconomic management.

The evolution of Turkey's energy policy increasingly emphasized the need to transition to a more diverse energy mix in response to domestic demands and international pressures. The earlier dependence on fossil fuels, particularly oil and natural gas – mostly from geopolitically sensitive regions – posed significant risks to energy security. Turkey initiated a strategic shift to mitigate these risks, including renewable energy sources like wind, solar, and hydropower. This diversification aligned with global trends, where countries sought to reduce the environmental impacts of fossil fuels while simultaneously addressing socio-economic demands for growth.

Introducing the private sector into Turkey's energy policy represents a significant shift in the country's approach to energy management and economic sustainability. The liberalization and privatization of the energy sector took place in the 2000s, driven by the recognition that efficiency and investment could be improved

through a dynamic market environment. Nevertheless, the success of these reforms was accompanied by numerous issues, and their practical implementation often resembled theoretical reforms with persistent inefficiencies. Therefore, addressing institutional barriers and ensuring regulatory mechanisms are essential for realizing the full potential of sustainable investments, which are crucial for the further development of Turkey's energy market.

The development of hydropower plants and coal resources has played a key role in shaping Turkey's energy policy throughout history. Given the limited reserves of fossil fuels, the strategic emphasis on hydropower emerged as a sustainable alternative to reduce dependence on imports. The government aimed to significantly increase the share of hydropower in electricity production, with ambitions to substantially raise this share by 2023. However, the interconnection between hydropower plants and coal resources reveals the challenges of balancing sustainable energy development with ongoing dependence on fossil fuels. As Turkey strives to reduce the use of fossil fuels, integrating diverse energy sources remains crucial for achieving energy security and addressing the adverse effects of climate change on existing production capacities (Kibaroğlu 2008).

The complexity of energy import dynamics plays a key role in shaping Turkey's energy security, significantly influencing its foreign policy and regional stability. The conflict in Ukraine further complicated energy security in Europe, forcing Turkey to explore alliances and partnerships with alternative suppliers from the Caspian region. Furthermore, Turkey's involvement in these energy projects has been affected by broader regional conflicts and power struggles in the Middle East and on the global level.

The period from 1980 to 2000 represented a significant phase of modernization and reform in the context of Turkey's energy policy. During this period, foreign direct investments (FDI) were key to strengthening the energy sector, enabling technology transfer and infrastructure development. Additionally, Turkey's aspiration to approach the European Union underlined its modernization efforts, as improvements in energy policy were considered essential for EU accession negotiations.

As Turkey sought to align its energy policies with EU standards, the emphasis shifted to sustainability and market efficiency, reflecting broader global trends in energy management (Hebda 2025). The expansion

of natural gas infrastructure represented a key aspect of Turkey's energy policy, reflecting domestic needs and geopolitical ambitions.

Turkey's energy policy has undergone significant changes in the last two decades, aimed at modernization and sustainability amid growing regional and global challenges. Considerable effort has been invested to diversify energy sources, reduce dependence on fossil fuel imports, and improve domestic production, particularly renewable energy. This transition is evident through initiatives to harness Turkey's solar and wind resources, positioning the country as a potential energy hub for Europe, highlighted by projects connected with the Southern Gas Corridor. Furthermore, Turkey actively cooperates to align its policies with global energy efficiency standards and environmental responsibility, strengthening its policies through multilateral agreements. The future trajectory points to a more profound commitment to renewable energy resources and an increased focus on equitable access to energy.

The Turkish intelligence service also ensures Turkey's energy security (*Milli İstihbarat Teşkilatı* – MIT). Thus, through information gathering, risk analysis, and support for the state's strategic energy interests, MIT contributes to the security of Turkey's energy structure. Above all, MIT also physically protects energy infrastructure, such as oil pipelines, gas pipelines, power plants, and distribution networks, from potential threats, eliminating terrorist attacks and virtual-hacker attacks on digital systems for managing energy resources.

Turkey increasingly uses energy policy as a means of geopolitical influence, particularly in its relations with the European Union, Russia, the Middle East, and the Caucasus (Perišić 2018). MIT plays a central role in this by analysing the strategic interests of other countries and their energy policies to secure Turkey's place within them. In their work, information is collected about oil and gas reserves in the region, geopolitical ambitions, and armed conflicts in the area, and based on this, Turkey's actions are planned as an indispensable transit route in energy transport.

Turkey's strategic location makes it a transit corridor for natural gas destined for Europe. The development of projects such as TANAP and TAP further reinforces Turkey's ambitions to become Europe's energy hub and thereby push aside the influence of competitors.

Expanding natural gas infrastructure is key to Turkey's energy policy, reflecting domestic needs and geopolitical ambitions. For this reason, the development of pipelines and LNG terminals is crucial. The

mixture of natural resources, such as natural gas from the Caspian and Middle Eastern regions, shows how Turkey, with its position, enables the connection of supplier countries with energy-dependent markets in Europe, emphasizing its role in shaping energy security policies (Bilgin 2009).

In Turkey's geopolitical reality, the country's relations with neighboring states, especially Greece and Armenia, are marked by a complex combination of historical disagreements and contemporary political ambitions. Turkey's engagement with these states often reflects neo-Ottoman aspirations, articulated through President Erdoğan's policy, to restore regional influence reminiscent of the Ottoman Empire (Tanasković 2010). This strategy prioritizes military and economic determination over diplomatic negotiations, resulting in increased tensions, particularly in the Aegean Sea and the South Caucasus, where territorial disputes are prominent. Furthermore, Turkey's geopolitical maneuvers are not limited to its immediate neighbors but extend through the framework of emerging alliances, which aim to balance the interests of the European Union in the region. These relations emphasize the broader implications of Turkey's aspirations for regional dominance and stability (Davutoğlu 2014).

We may say that today's Turkey occupies a central place in Eurasia's geopolitical and geoenergetic circumstances. Relations with the EU, NATO, Russia, and neighboring countries in the Caucasus and the Middle East show that Turkey pursues a policy of balancing between major powers, emphasizing its own autonomy and geopolitical ambitions (Yergin 2011).

In conclusion, Turkey remains positioned to choose between two paths: to remain merely a transit route between East and West, or to build the status of a global energy mogul. By all indications, Turkey is choosing the latter path, ignoring criticisms of Pan-Turkism or Neo-Ottomanism, which are being implemented even in the field of energy security.

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