

# Precious loneliness working against Turkey's energy interests

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**Turkey cannot become an energy hub if it continues to pursue contentious relations with its neighbors, according to an energy expert. Turkey needs to have energy-focused policies so that it does not miss opportunities provided by the big changes that are taking place in global energy trends, says Professor Volkan Ediger of Kadir Has University**



Precious loneliness, which has been used by the Justice and Development Party (AKP) to justify Turkey's contentious relations with some of its neighbors, is working against the country's energy interests, according to an energy expert.

Turkey cannot fulfill its aspiration of becoming an energy hub if it is not even on talking terms with its neighbors, according to Professor Volkan Ediger, director of the Center for Energy and Sustainable Development at Kadir Has University.

## **Tell us about global trends first.**

There are very important changes in the global trends. In the past, the projections for the present days were for the share of oil to decrease and that of natural gas to increase. We were expecting natural gas to replace coal as the second biggest energy resource and then make it to the very top.

But the upward trend of natural gas stopped, and the downward trend of coal reversed. That's because [China](#) entered the picture. [China](#) is growing and thanks to its membership in the World Trade Organization, it can sell its products everywhere in the world. As a local energy source, it introduced coal, which had been discredited by the West. But [China](#) uses clean coal energy, so it constructs a coal plant each week. [China](#) has also become the biggest consumer of energy. The United States' 100 years dominance in the sector was replaced by China.

Another important issue to mention is state capitalism. Countries like China, India, [Brazil](#) and Malaysia have established autonomous state companies. State capitalism has started to weaken the power of big, private companies. This trend has started to influence [Europe](#) and the United States. In a period when there is so much interstate competition, geopolitics has become much more important, and the markets do not function according to the rules of liberal market model. Countries are obliged to put all their state means behind their national companies to guarantee their energy security. [Russia](#) has shown it; we are in a period when energy will be used in international relations as a weapon.

### **You are talking about Russia's latest moves on Ukraine.**

The [Black Sea](#) is one of the most promising areas in terms of oil. Turkey has opened six deep sea wells in the course of the last 10 years. It's still in the early stages.

The bottom of the [Black Sea](#) is rich in methane hydrate; it's a gas in a solid form. [Russia](#) had only 15 percent of the [Black Sea](#) [under its sovereignty] before it included Crimea; now [Russia](#) has 36 percent. The only oil and gas discovery in the [Black Sea](#) took place in the area surrounding Crimea.

The eastern half of [Ukraine](#) has the biggest coal resources. These are important reasons behind Russia's policy on Ukraine. I think [Ukraine](#) will become like the Germany of World War II.

Following developments in Ukraine, [Russia](#) canceled the South Stream and said it would be replaced by the Turkish Stream. Everyone was shocked, and I don't think anybody in Turkey was expecting this. This was a smart move on the part of Russia, and both the EU and Turkey do not know what to do.

### **Turkey has approached the issue positively, though.**

We don't know if Turkey will benefit from that. No deal has yet been signed between the two governments so far. We are not discussing any of these issues. It's not clear to me what the benefit of Turkish Stream to Turkey will be. We have to think a lot about these issues, but we are just being reactive. The same is valid for what happens in the south.

Israel is trying to produce gas, but transportation remains a problem. Also, they have to sell it to other countries and the only country to buy is Turkey. Yet we have a lot of problems with Israel; if we had our traditional good relations with Israel, everything could have been much better.

In the course of the last 10 years, southern Cyprus has signed three agreements on exclusive economic zones (EEZ) with three of its neighbors: Israel, Egypt and Lebanon. What did we do? We did almost nothing. There is no doubt that unless

there is stability in the region, these energy resources will not be exploited. Syria is at war, and there is contention between Turkey and [Israel](#) and contention between southern Cyprus and northern Cyprus.

**If that is the case, so long as Turkey is not in the equation, the cooperation between Israel, Egypt, southern Cyprus and [Greece](#) will not be taken too seriously.**

But let's not forget that southern Cyprus has been active on the issue. It has created a win-win situation by involving eight or nine countries. It has signed agreements with three countries; by inviting Total, it brings France into the picture, with ENI, Italy, and with Nobel, the U.S. Southern Cyprus is in an alliance with seven or eight countries. What are the countries that we are allied to? Zero.

**Perhaps Turkey is counting on the fact that not much can take place in the end without Turkey being included in the picture.**

Perhaps. Or perhaps these are not issues we focus on. We give priority to Syria and to the contention with Israel. I don't think we have developed an energy-focused policy. Yet the hottest geopolitical areas in terms of energy happen to be on our borders.

The fact that the leaders of southern Cyprus, [Greece](#) and Egypt met [last week] is proof that we have lost our influence in the region. [Greek](#) Cypriots have got the Israelis and Egyptians on their side, while we are in a hostile relationship with Egypt, [Israel](#) and Syria.

**I guess you are alluding to precious loneliness.**

This precious loneliness works against us on energy issues. We want to be an energy hub, but we can't become an energy hub when we have hostile relations with everybody. We need to be on talking terms and in friendships with all; in fact, energy can be a tool to strengthen the friendship.

**You talked about changes in the global trends; what will be their effect on Turkey?**

Turkey's biggest energy resource is coal, [a commodity] whose use was always especially discouraged by Europe. With the [China](#) factor, coal production has started to increase in the world as well. This is a good occasion for us. It will be easier for us to use an energy resource that is no longer discredited as in the past; we need to make use of coal since no country can develop without a domestic energy resource. We need to resort to coal, provided we use clean technology. But not only clean but secure energy; look at what happened in Soma [in which 301 coal miners died last year in a massive accident]. There are no such big casualties in countries with much higher production levels.

But as far as global trends are concerned; I have to underline that we have been too focused on domestic issues for the past four, five years. Even foreign policy has become an issue of domestic policies. The world is in a transition period as far as energy is concerned. We need to look outside, yet we are too consumed by internal issues. We need to use energy for development, but this can't happen with the current trend in Turkey.

## **What do you think about the latest developments on electricity; there was a huge power cut recently, leaving the country in the dark for hours.**

A cat was said to enter a power distribution unit during [the March 30, 2014] elections; recently 15 cities went dark; when you listen to some explanations, you can only laugh at them. We still are unable to explain what happened. It's shameful that we still don't know the real reason.

### **What does this tell us?**

Look, if there is a human error or a malfunction in the system, this is unacceptable. Why were necessary measures not taken to prevent it? If it's a human error, then you need to work with the right people.

If somebody or some people did something without us knowing it, this is equally unacceptable, since it shows the vulnerability of the system.

At the end of the day, my point is this: states are taking the energy issue very seriously. We should not lose time as we are also in a transition period in the energy world. We should not miss the opportunities that can be wide open. Other countries are aware of the importance of the energy wars. They gather their best people, and they develop strategies. We are in a period when national interests are very important and the rest is simply detail. We need to think of our national interests as far as our region is concerned. We need to have an energy-focused policy. We can't go on with internal conflicts or with contentions with our neighbors.

### **Who is Volkan Ediger?**



Volkan Ediger is currently the head of Energy Systems Engineering Department and the director of the Center for Energy and Sustainable Development at Kadir Has University.

He graduated from the Geological Engineering Department of Middle East Technical University (ODTÜ) in [Ankara](#) in 1976 and received his PhD degree from Pennsylvania State University.

He gained his industrial experience primarily at the Research Center of the Turkish Petroleum Corporation where he initiated and coordinated several research and development projects, mainly on oil and gas exploration.

Between 1998 and 2010, he was the first person to hold the newly created position of energy adviser to the president of Turkey and worked with three successive presidents.

He is the founder and the president of the Energy and Climate Change Foundation.

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