

## Analyzing The Presence of Russia in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea

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### **Abstrak**

*Laut Mediterania memiliki daya tarik bagi negara-negara yang ingin menguasai daerah ini. Diantaranya adalah kekayaan sumber daya energi yang melimpah (seperti, minyak dan gas alam), memiliki jalur perdagangan internasional yang menghubungkan Eropa, Afrika, dan Asia, serta menawarkan pantai atau pelabuhan yang dapat dibangun dan beroperasi sepanjang tahun. Oleh karena itu, negara superpower seperti Rusia tertarik untuk menjadi salah satu aktor yang mendominasi kawasan ini. Aktivitas Rusia di kawasan ini telah terjadi semenjak era kekaisaran Rusia (Tsardom). Namun, seiring berjalannya waktu, Russia memiliki ambisi untuk menguasai kembali kawasan yang sebelumnya mereka kuasai. Kawasan Mediteranian khususnya Mediterania Timur menjadi kawasan strategis bagi Rusia dalam melaksanakan kepentingan politik luar negerinya di mana mereka ingin mengamankan cadangan sumber daya alam dan jalur perdagangan internasional serta mencari pelabuhan yang dapat beroperasi selama satu tahun penuh. Riset ini bertujuan untuk menganalisa bagaimana kepentingan kebijakan luar negeri Rusia mampu menegaskan kehadirannya di laut Mediterania Timur. Dengan menggunakan metode penelitian kualitatif, riset ini akan menganalisa kehadiran Rusia di laut Mediterania Timur. Riset ini menemukan bahwa Rusia dapat menunjukkan kehadirannya di kawasan Mediterania Timur dengan menggunakan beberapa manuver politik seperti aneksasi Krimea, menjalin hubungan dengan Turki dan Suriah, serta penggunaan politik energi dalam kebijakan luar negeri mereka.*

**Kata Kunci:** *Russia, Mediterania Timur, Kehadiran, Kebijakan Luar Negeri, Kepentingan*

### **Abstract**

The Mediterranean Sea has an attraction for countries that want to control this area. Among them are the abundant energy resources (such as oil and natural gas), have international trade routes that connect Europe, Africa, and Asia, and offer beaches or ports that can be built and operate year-round. Therefore, a superpower country like Russia is interested in becoming one of the actors that dominate this region. Russian activity in this region has occurred since the era of

the Russian empire (Tsardom). However, over time, Russia has ambitions to regain control of the area they previously controlled. The Mediterranean region, especially the Eastern Mediterranean, is a strategic area for Russia in carrying out its foreign policy interests where they want to secure natural resource reserves and international trade routes and look for ports that can operate for a full year. This research aims to analyze how Russia's foreign policy interests result in its presence in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea. Using qualitative research methods, this research will analyze Russia's presence in the East Mediterranean Sea. This research finds that Russia can demonstrate its presence in the Eastern Mediterranean region by using several political manoeuvres such as the annexation of Crimea, establishing relations with Turkey and Syria, and the use of energy politics in their foreign policy.

**Keywords:** Russia, Eastern Mediterranean, Presence, Foreign Policy, Interest

## 1. Introduction

Russia is a country that has a very vast area and a lot of resources. With its vast territory and vast resources, Russia can be counted as one of the world's superpowers (Minkina, 2019). With holding the titles as superpower country, Russia is able to counterweight the other great powers like the United States (US). And, to be able to counter other entities in international politics, a country like Russia must be able to show its presence in a scale of a region. One particular region that Russia is able to show its presence in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea. The Eastern Mediterranean Sea or Region is representing the constellations of states that are geographically located on the shore of the Eastern Mediterranean Sea namely, Greece, Turkey, the Republic of Cyprus, Israel, Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, and the Palestine Authority (Stivachtis, 2002).

There are several reasons why Russia is interested in this region, first, this region has rich of natural resources reserves (Burdeau, 2020). It is plausible enough to understand that every country will seek a natural resource reserve especially if that country economy is dependent on natural resources export. And, it's a fact that Russia economy is still dependent on the export of natural resources (oil and gas). However, not only rich of natural resources but this region serves as one of the busiest trade routes in the world. Eastern Mediterranean Sea specifically in the Suez Canal holds a strategic route for energy, commodities, consumer goods, and componentry from Asia and the Middle East to Europe or vice versa. With such traits that this region offers, it's no wonder superpower countries like Russia is interested to dominate in this region.

Eastern Mediterranean Sea also offers Russia to access warm-water ports that could be used throughout the year. Russia with its immense geographical territory only has a limited port that could be used during the winter, especially on the northern border. There is one region that could be used throughout the year namely Vladivostok, however, it is bordering with US-North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) allies which is Japan and South Korea. If Russia builds a port

that capable to hold large naval vessels, their movement in this region will be limited because of the presence of Japan and South Korea. Not only that, the traits offered by this region is not the same as what the Eastern Mediterranean Sea offer where the trade route is only reaching South-East Asia. Therefore, by showing presence in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea, Russia can secure the natural resources reserves, trade routes, and build warm-water ports.

Derived from the traits that the Eastern Mediterranean Sea offers, an ambition is rising from Russia to dominate or secure the Eastern Mediterranean Sea to be their strategic region in order to spread their influence. Political manoeuvres need to be done in this region by Russia to pursue their goal to become a dominant power in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea. Therefore, this research will examine how does Russia's foreign policy interest resulted in its presence in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea. This paper will explain about political manoeuvres that are taken by Russia to show its presence in the Mediterranean Sea. Starting from the literature review that could provide information about Russia activity in the Mediterranean region, a theoretical framework that could explain the phenomenon of Russia interest in the region, political manoeuvres that have been taken by Russia (supporting the Bashar al-Assad regime, annexation of Crimea, and Strengthen ties with Turkey), and lastly the conclusion of this research.

## **2. Literature Review**

Literature or discussions on Russia's activities in the Eastern Mediterranean region have been published in various international journals. It should be acknowledged that Russia's activities in the Eastern Mediterranean region are of particular concern to scholars or researchers, especially in the field of international relations. Therefore, this sub-chapters are aimed to provide information regarding Russian activities in the Mediterranean or Eastern Mediterranean from previous studies.

Russian activities in the Eastern Mediterranean region always utilize energy issues. Energy issue or so-called energy politics plays an integral part in Russia's political manoeuvre in the Mediterranean region. The reason to counter the presence of the United States with its NATO allies and EU in the region. The presence of these two other entities made Russia must have a counter policy or strategy to remain an important actor in the Mediterranean region. Marc Pierini (2019) illustrates how Russia uses energy politics as an integral part of its foreign policy in the Mediterranean region and its relevance to the EU. Pierini explains that since President Vladimir Putin rose into power, energy politics has always played a central part in Russian foreign policy. Pierini demonstrates how Russia manoeuvring its energy politics managed to thwart the EU's diversification strategy by cutting off gas supplies from Ukraine. Pierini believes that this manoeuvre intended to "prod Europe into forcing Ukraine to capitulate in the dispute" (Pierini, 2019) and also EU considers this as energy blackmail. In the research, Pierini explains that Russia is also taken into account of other entities that could disrupt their manoeuvre. Russia sees other countries that have natural

gas resources (i.e. the Middle East and North African (MENA)), as competitors. However, Russia did not engage them with offensive policies but rather tried to cooperate with them. So then Russia can lock their opponent with this strategy which is by controlling natural gas resources.

Previously, is already mentioned before that the Eastern Mediterranean Sea offers Russia warm-water access that could operate throughout the year. Access to warm water is one of Russia's interests in the pursuit of becoming one of the dominant power in this region. The search for access to warm water is motivated by the geographical condition of Russia which is "locked" on the mainland. Access to the outside world by sea is closed during winter. The research conducted by Tanvi Chauhan (2020) explains that the reason why Russia needs access to warm water is that it "enables Russia to control the sea, project power, maintain good order, and observe a maritime consensus" (Chauhan, 2020). In the research, Chauhan took two different study cases of Russian manoeuvres in the Mediterranean region, namely Crimean and Tartus. Chauhan explains that controlling the sea means that securing it for everyone except the one who is out of the system. To control a sea, a country needs a port that could operate 365 days. Chauhan illustrates that allowing a country to have ports means the country can project its "power for historic or cultural reasons, meet geopolitical ends, and even militaristic expeditionary operations away from their shorelines" (Chauhan, 2020).

Muhittin Tolga Özsağlam (2020), explains that Russia's activities in the Mediterranean region can be counted as a revival to influence that region. In the research, Özsağlam narrates how Russia rebuild their status as an influential country in global politics, especially in the Mediterranean region. Özsağlam believes that the reason Russia is interested in the Mediterranean is due to "the political heritage of the Soviet Union and has therefore also tried to protect its influential position at both regional and global levels" (Özsağlam, 2020). Another researcher like Tatiana Zonova (2015) also discusses Russian interest in the Mediterranean region. In Zonova's research, the current interest of Russia in the Mediterranean region is based on Russia's historical involvement in that region. It is started when Russia adopted the Tsardom or Imperial government system and continue until Russia change its government system to a communist state and changed it again into the current government system. Therefore, a historical legacy also become one of the factors why Russia is interested in the region.

In carrying out its national interests, Russia should experience prospects and constraints. Aleksandr Irkhin and Olga Moskalenko (2019) analyze the prospects and constraints faced by Russia when they implement the foreign policy. In the research, Irkhin and Moskalenko analyze that since the dissolutions of the Soviet Union, Russia lost most of its territory. But after the reunion with Crimea is changed the whole game. Irkhin and Moskalenko believe that there are three main concentrations of Russia foreign policy in the Mediterranean namely, preventing other expansion of non-regional power (the US) and the hostile political and military bloc (EU), saving the influence on the Mediterranean region inherited

from USSR and creating a balance of power, and controlling Eurasian hydrocarbon production transfers via a Russian transfer system.

Russia's activities in the Mediterranean region give the west its attention to the stability and dynamics of this region. Moreover, Russia's recent activities, namely the annexation of Crimea and the port in Tartus, could be counted as a sign that Russia wants to return to the status they had during the Soviet Union era. Spyridon N. Litsas (2016) explain how the west could counter Russia's activities in the Mediterranean region. Litsas explains that the west tried several ways to counter Russia's activities namely deterrence and containment. The west decide to deter Russia through the "construction of a technologically advanced European missile defence shield that comprises a NATO base in Deveselu, a command and control centre at Ramstein Air Base in Germany, a radar installation in Turkey, four ships capable of identifying enemy missiles and firing their SM-3s based in Rota, Spain, and a land-based missile system in Redzikowo, Poland that will be fully functional by 2018" (Litsas, 2016). But Litsas believe that such deterrence is not enough to counter Russia's activities. That's why containment measurement is needed. In containment measurement, Litsas explains how the west could slow down the Russian expansions namely, containing Russia's soft power on Orthodox Christian, NATO enlargement, dealing with the Jihadists in Syria, and new NATO maritime strategy. However, due to the west's hesitancy, Russia was able to exploit and spread its influence in this region. Now the west must face a new reality of the Mediterranean region.

The activities of Russia in the Eastern Mediterranean regions will remain as long as they still standoff with the NATO allies. Eugene Rumer and Richard Sokolsky (2021) believe that what Russia do in the Mediterranean region is to prevent the US with its NATO allies from dominating the region. Eastern Mediterranean become an important theatre for Russia not only to reclaim what they've in the previous era (Soviet Era) but also to preserve their national security. And so far, what Russia did in this region has already complicated the US-NATO operations by having a good relationship with important regional powers. Eugene Rumer and Richard Sokolsky believe the current Russian manoeuvres in the regions is to protect what they have in Syria and defend "against the threat that Russian leaders see from NATO land, air, and naval capabilities to the Russian heartland." (Rumer & Sokolsky, 2021). Therefore, Russia activities in the Mediterranean region is to stay not only for preserving their national security but also their objective in this region.

### **3. Theoretical Framework**

This academic research focuses in particular on the theoretical approach of neorealism. Neorealism arose in the late 1970s to become alongside neoliberalism, one of the influential approaches to understanding global politics. Neorealism is a manifestation of the Realism paradigm along with classical, structural, offensive, and neoclassical which have relevance for understanding regional orders. This paradigm comes from the thoughts of Kenneth N. Waltz which is based on a critique of traditional realism. Kenneth Waltz's (1979) book

namely Theory of International Politics would be the one that can be thought of as the foundational text of neorealism. In his book, Waltz asserts that the important features of international relations, specifically the actions of great powers, could be explained solely in terms of the anarchical structure of the international system (Waltz, 1979).

John Joseph Mearsheimer (2001) one of the proponents of neorealism believes that states behave according to the structure of the international system. It's how states are organized and what the architecture of the international system looks like. It largely influences how those states behave. Just like Waltz, Mearsheimer believes that the key organizing principle of the international system is anarchy. Anarchy says that there is no higher authority above states. What those states will do is they will compete with each other for power.

Neorealism believes that "regional order is very much a function of the structure of the larger international system, as well as of the balance of power among the great powers." (Paul, 2012). The idea of balance of power theory is force meeting with force, which means that a balanced state will be achieved when there are two forces whose essence is balanced meet each other. If the two states or entities have the same amount of parity of their power capability, then it is unlikely both of them go to war. Normally, a state who has a strong amount of power that goes to war is capable to dominate its weaker opponent and become a hegemon. Balance of power theory does not accept the situation where there is only one actor in the regional order. This is because the hegemonic state will impose its will on other countries.

This would explain why Russia is interested in the Mediterranean region. Probably, not only searching for access to the open ocean and ice-free ports but they also seek power close to their regional territory. Where after the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, Russia's position weakened on a regional (European) or international scale. However, over time, Russia re-established its existence. Balance of power theory asserts that if two countries or coalitions have the same power, war can be avoided. And with a balance of power, a country cannot impose its will or interfere with the interests of other countries. This is where the anarchy described by Waltz and Mearsheimer is reached that no entity is above the state itself. The author of this research argues that there is a possibility that Russia understands due to the presence of the EU and US-NATO close to their regional area, can threaten the stability of their national security. One option to find a balance of power for Russia is to restructure and demonstrate its existence in the Mediterranean region.

#### **4. Research Methodology**

This academic research seeks to find a new understanding of the phenomena studied in this academic research, namely Analyzing the presence of Russia in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea. The author of this academic research would apply observation and document analysis to collect the data that will be needed in this research. The data collection would be relying on official reports or documents from respective countries that relate to this research. Also, studies or

publications on Russian activities in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea would be used in this thesis to observe the behavioural activities of Russia in the Mediterranean region.

## **5. Russia Dependency on Natural Resources**

Generations after generations, the area within the Mediterranean region has been filled with turbulence. For example, the bitter relationship and conflict between Arabs and Israel to the animosity between Turkey and Greece. However, the discovery of natural resources underneath the Mediterranean basin would change the course of country interactions with each other. "The U.S. Geological Survey estimates that as much as 122 trillion cubic feet of gas and 1.7 billion barrels of oil lie in the eastern Mediterranean basin. That amount of gas is equivalent to about 76 years of gas consumption in the European Union. (Markind, 2020). The author of the research argues that the discovery of natural resources within the Mediterranean basin would cause countries to rush for claiming the resources to achieve energy security. Presumably, countries will reconsider how they interact and overlook the historical relationship to reach a cooperation agreement that was previously unreachable.

Russia has made their move with their activist foreign policy since 2014 where they annexed Crimea from Ukraine and intervene in the Syrian civil war. Crimea serves as their Russian Navy strategic point that would give space for Russia to demonstrate that military might Mediterranean country. It also goes the same with Syria where they have a port and Syria remains allies since the Soviet Union era. This gave a clear message to the Mediterranean country also to the West that Russia is trying to claim what is lying underneath the Mediterranean basin. In addition, Russia also deals with a softer movement to countries that possess natural resources (MENA countries) by using diplomatic ties or cooperation. Presumably, Russia didn't want to add more foes in their mission to become a major power in the Mediterranean region.

For more than a decade, the Russian government has been trying to diversify commodities for sale abroad to end their dependence on natural resources export. And, it would take more time until Russia can be assured from its dependency on natural resources exports especially on natural gas and oil. Despite the fluctuating success, oil and gas is still the main commodity for Russian exports and this makes Russian revenues vulnerable to the fluctuations of oil and gas prices. "Oil-and-gas sales contribute as much as one-fifth of the nation's GDP, while fuel and energy products make up the majority of Russia's exports" (Kantchev, 2021). To specify, Russian natural resources exports heavily rely on oil and gas production for 60%, and the two commodities are responsible for 30% of Russian GDP (Depresio, 2019). Therefore, it is logical that oil and gas have been Russia's main export goods for decades.

The main target for Russian gas and oil exports are the European countries. Europe is relying on Russia for around 35%-40% of its gas import (Twidale, 2021; Moravcsik, 2020). Most of it comes via pipelines including the Yamal, which passes through Belarus and Poland to Germany, the Nord Stream, which goes directly to Germany, and the pipeline through Ukraine. And, there are manoeuvres from the

EU to reduce their dependency on Russian natural resources import. However, that plan is still on hold because not all EU countries are capable to change the source of natural resources import.

### **5.1 Russia Energy Politics**

The availability and abundance of natural resources (gas and oil) owned by Russia are used as a tool for making political policies towards neighbouring countries. Since Putin's rose into power, Russia made energy politics take a role as an integral part of Russia's political manoeuvre in Europe and the Mediterranean region (Pierini, 2019). The EU heavily relied on Russian gas as they import it nearly 40% (Moravcsik, 2020). It is badly advised to refuse Russian gas because substituting the source of one-third of their gas resource is almost impossible for some EU countries and expensive for others.

Although there are two pipelines, namely the Baltic Sea and Belarus, Ukraine is an important transit country for the EU and Russia to export gas and oil (Pierini, 2019). Ukraine is in the middle of the European region which makes Ukraine's existence one of the countries that have geopolitical advantages. However, Ukraine's weakness by relying heavily on Russian gas is exploited by the Kremlin through energy politics. This happened in 2006 when Russia reduced the amount of gas supply to Ukraine. The gas alternative was chosen because both Ukraine and the European Union are dependent on gas supplies from Russia. By stopping the delivery of gas supplies to Ukraine and the European Union, Ukraine and the European Union will experience a gas shortage that disrupts economic activities and people's activities, especially in the winter seasons. The reason why Russia used energy politics against Ukraine was to regain influence in the EU after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Also, it gives a clear view that Russian give signals to the EU that they have the power to disrupt EU energy security.

Russia understands very well that until now Europe is still dependent on the use of gas and oil. And as already explained before, Russia has used its energy politics several times in its foreign policy towards Europe. An apt illustration of this statement is how Russia has a direct pipeline to Germany known as Nord Stream 2. Because it is so dependent on this pipeline, Germany is very careful when it comes to dealings with Russia. The same thing happened to the Balkan countries. In addition, with the completion of the gas pipeline between Russia and Turkey (Jones, 2020) and plans for expansion into central and southern Europe, presumably, Russia is on its move to reduce its gas supply through Ukraine. This will cost greatly for the EU if they didn't ready and do not come up with a reserve plan.

Not only in Europe, but Russia is also actively using its energy politics in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) countries. Russia considers countries that have gas and oil reserves as competitors and have the probability of being enemies. However, the steps taken by Russia in dealing with the MENA countries are to cooperate. Through a series of agreements and investments done by Russia in their foreign policy decision towards MENA countries. To illustrate, In Egypt, Russia bought 30 percent of the share of the Zohr field from the Italian energy



group called ENI (Pierini, 2019). This would be perceived by the MENA countries that Russia is not only capable to use its force but also becoming a friendly country to have ties with. With the series of agreements with MENA countries, Russia can secure its oil and gas production but the price fluctuation is also hostile to the Russian economy.

### **5.3 Why is Russia Dependent on the Eastern Mediterranean Sea**

The Eastern Mediterranean Sea holds many traits that countries bordering this region benefited from it. This sea has the same traits as what the South China Sea have. However, for Russia, it is more favourable for them to dominate the Eastern Mediterranean Region. Several reasons could explain why Russia want to control this region. First, as already mentioned before, in energy issue, Mediterranean holds a whelming abundant of natural resources. Not only that, Mediterranean Region hold a strategic canal, namely Suez Canal, that could provide a trade route and connect Europe, Africa, and Asia. By securing this strategic region, Russia can preserve their energy issue and international trade.

Mediterranean region also offers Russia warm-water ports that could be used in a full year. Since the Tsardom Era, Russia is seeking a strategic region that could hold large naval vessels and fully operate in a year and it continues until the Soviet era. However, because of the dissolve of the Soviet Union, Russia has lost some of its territories. And, this led Russia to lose of some its naval facilities because it fell to the newly independent states. Therefore, there is some political interest in why Russia try to re-enter the Mediterranean region is because they're trying to reclaim what they've previously and at the same time they're trying to secure their dominance in the region.

However, in the pursuit to become the dominant power, the presence of the US with NATO allies and the EU will be a challenge for Russia. Russia needs to win the heart of countries that bordering with the Mediterranean Sea. In order to control the sea, Russia must control the shoreline (Grygiel, 2020). Without controlling coastlines (such as; ports, access points, markets, and governments on them), the navy alone is useless. A power that controls the shore and the sea will become a hegemony in the region. Therefore, Russia must strengthen its relationship with countries like Turkey and Syria. With Syria, Russia remain allies since the Soviet era. However, since the Tsardom era, Turkey and Russia has a bitter-sweet relation throughout their history. And now, Turkey is one of the NATO members. This specific challenge needs to be overcome by Russia in order to pursue their goal in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea.

### **5.4 Russia Annexation of Crimea**

The Crimean crisis was originally a domestic problem in Ukraine. In its development, the Crimean crisis invited horizontal conflicts between the European Union countries and Russia. The domestic conflict that started with Ukraine's exit from the European Association Agreement in 2013 (Konończuk, 2013) and sparked massive protests by students in Kyiv that led to Yanukovich's removal from office in February 2014 (Booth, 2014). The removal of Yanukovich from

office made Ukraine divided into two influences, namely those who sided with the West (European Union and the United States) and pro-Russia. At that time, Sergei Aksyonov rose into power and become the Prime Minister of Crimea (Shuster, 2014) and requested Russia to solve the crisis. The rise of Aksyonov made him a valuable ally for Russia because he is more inclined towards Russian influence than Western influence. This becomes the opening door for the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014.

Russia sees this as an opportunity to take back one of its territories. The author of this research argues there is a possibility why Russia deploy its troops in Crimea is because Crimea is one of the strategic points for Russia to control the Black Sea. As already explained before, Crimea has a historical link with Russia where they were annexed in the Tsardom era and continue to be part of Soviet Russia. But, the fall of the Soviet Union has made Crimea must be separated from Russia because Crimea falls under Ukrainian jurisdiction. With the political turmoil and civil unrest that happened within the Ukrainian, Russia believes that this is one of their chances to take back Crimea. "President Vladimir Putin's justifies the aggression, in part, by asserting that Crimea is mostly comprised of ethnic Russians." (Popovici, 2018).

With the fall of Crimea to the Russian hands, the pursuit of becoming the centre of influence of the Mediterranean region becomes closer. Crimea peninsula specifically Sevastopol is warm-ports and can hold a large number of vessels. Not like other Russian ports that could freeze during the winter and couldn't hold a large number of vessels. However, when Crimea fall to the Russian hand, much of the military infrastructure has been decayed. This is because the Ukrainians did not prioritize their military infrastructure in Crimea. But, soon after Russia set foot on the peninsula, Russia begin the restoration of military infrastructure in Crimea (Gressel, 2021). Therefore, with the capacity of using military power to coerce neighbouring countries and defend Crimea, Russia can demonstrate its existence in the region.

### **5.5 Strengthening Relations with Turkey and Syria**

Even though Russia gain control of the Black Sea by annexing the Crimean peninsula, the pursue to gain presence in the Mediterranean is not enough by only controlling the Black Sea. Having good relations in Mediterranean countries is needed to secure the prospect of Russia's presence in the region. If Russia desire to present in the Mediterranean region, countries that needed to be counted is Turkey and Syria. Starting from Turkey, Russia and Turkey have had long historical strategic relations since and can be traced from Ottoman and Tsardom eras. Historically, the relations between the two countries can be said rather bitter, and history records that the two of them are engaged in the Russo-Turkish war.

However, at the current time, Tukey holds two strategic straits that could allow the Russian Navy to present in the Mediterranean Sea namely Bosphorus and Dardanelles Strait. There is a major setback in the relations of the two countries where Turkey shot down the Russian SU-24 (Nissenbaum, Peker, & Marson, 2015) but it took some time for Turkey to apologize to Russia (Stubbs & Solovyov, 2016).

But, maintaining good relations is one of the priority options for Russia to secure their route (Bosporus and Dardanelles) to the Mediterranean Sea.

In addition, the newest development between Russia and Turkey relations is the launching of the new gas pipeline. The new pipeline "will carry Russian natural gas to southern Europe through Turkey, part of Moscow's efforts to reduce shipments via Ukraine." (Astakhova & Sezer, 2020). The author of this research argues that this new development could lead to two possibilities. First, there is a major improvement between Russia and Turkey relations and probably Turkey could ease Russia Navy to pass their strait. However, there is also a possibility that Russia could use their energy export to blackmail Turkey whenever they begin to retaliate with Russian interest. However, it seems Russia didn't want to oppose Turkey because they're backed with NATO and have a bitter relation with Syria.

The other country that Russia already has relations with is Syria. The relations between Russia and Syria could be traced from the Soviet era where the two countries agree to establish bilateral relations and build a naval facility in Tartus (Breslauer, 1990, p. 328). After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Russia inherited the naval facility in Tartus and continue to have relations with Syria. In 2015, Russia was directly involved in the Syrian civil war by aiding Bashar al Assad's army with military assistance. The civil war since 2011 was sparked by the Arab Spring movement, a group calling itself the opposition, rising against the regime in Damascus under President Bashar al Assad.

The Syrian civil war is a very complicated situation, not as simple as one side against the other. There are three main actors in the Syrian conflict, namely the Syrian Army of the Assad regime, the anti-Assad regime, and ISIS (Oktarianisa, 2020). To date, the conflict appears to be entering a more static period of conflict. "However, the conflict is not completely "frozen" as Syria remains essentially volatile. Some areas, especially Idlib and parts of northeastern Syria, still have the potential for great contestation." (Yacoubian, 2021). The involvement of Russia in the Syrian civil war is intended to secure one of its valuable ports in Tartus. This port helps Russia to achieve and expand its presence in the Mediterranean region.

Maintaining relations with two opposite directions becomes a constraint and challenge for Russia to pursue its ambitions in the Mediterranean region. Turkey and Syria have become key partners for Russia to enter the Mediterranean basin. Therefore, Russia needs to change the hostile friendship between the three of them. Pathways have been paved with cooperations in the energy sector and if it continues positively, Russia would become closer to becoming one of a major role in the region.

## **6. Conclusion**

To sum up everything that has been discussed so far, Russia is capable to show their presence in the eastern Mediterranean region through a series of political manoeuvre that has been done almost in a decade. Despite pressure from the West, Russia is able to overcome these challenges with its foreign policy to spread its influence. Annexations of Crimea, relations with Turkey and Syria, and the use of energy politics towards EU and MENA countries are how Russia conduct

their foreign policy in the region. And, the author of this research argues that what Russia has done through its foreign policy is in favour of Russian ambitions.

Presumably, the Eastern Mediterranean is selected by Russia on their activist foreign policy because they need to secure the oil and gas reserve that is present underneath the Mediterranean basin. As already explained before, Russia is still dependent on its export of natural gas and oil. So, naturally, they need to preserve the rich natural resources region to increase their supply production. The next reason why Russia want to secure this region is because this region could offer Russia warm-water ports that they've sought for centuries and also secure the trade route for their international trade. And to preserve that, they need to present in the Mediterranean region. Therefore, the ambition to become one of the dominant power in the Eastern Mediterranean region is not only for political interest but also for securing their supply production of natural resources, seeking for one-year fully operated ports, and securing their international trade route.

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