EastMed and Europe's Strategic Energy Sovereignty

Emmanuel Navon / 1 June 2026

Executive Summary

For nearly a decade, the EastMed pipeline project has enjoyed sustained political backing while failing to secure the financial and commercial conditions necessary for implementation. Designed to connect Israeli and Cypriot offshore gas fields to Europe through Greece and potentially Italy, the project has repeatedly been delayed by financing difficulties, technical complexity, geopolitical disputes, and uncertainty surrounding Europe's long-term energy transition.

Yet the strategic environment surrounding EastMed has changed fundamentally since 2022. Russia's invasion of Ukraine exposed Europe's vulnerability to energy coercion. Simultaneously, repeated crises in the Strait of Hormuz and attacks on maritime traffic in the Red Sea highlighted the fragility of Europe's growing dependence on LNG shipping routes. While Europe diversified away from Russian gas, it did not fully achieve energy sovereignty.

The current alternative model—exporting Israeli gas to Europe through Egyptian LNG terminals—offers short-term flexibility but remains vulnerable to regional instability, domestic Egyptian demand pressures, and maritime disruption. Against this backdrop, EastMed increasingly appears less as a purely commercial project strategic corridor designed to reduce geopolitical exposure.

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The project nevertheless faces major obstacles. Its estimated cost of €6–8 billion, the absence of long-term purchase commitments, European decarbonization policies, and Turkish opposition continue to complicate investment decisions. EastMed is therefore unlikely to materialize under traditional market logic alone.

Its future depends on whether European governments decide to treat energy connectivity and maritime resilience as strategic infrastructure priorities comparable to defense or digital sovereignty. The question is no longer simply whether EastMed is profitable, but whether Europe is willing to invest in reducing future geopolitical vulnerability.

Introduction

The EastMed pipeline project was initially conceived as a commercial energy infrastructure linking the offshore gas reserves of Israel and Cyprus to European markets through Greece and Italy. For years, the project appeared trapped between political declarations and economic hesitation. Engineering studies progressed, diplomatic summits multiplied, and the European Union repeatedly classified EastMed as a Project of Common Interest (PCI), yet no Final Investment Decision (FID) was taken.

The geopolitical context has since evolved considerably.

Russia’s invasion of Ukraine transformed European energy policy by exposing the risks of strategic dependence on authoritarian suppliers. Europe rapidly increased LNG imports from the United States, Qatar, and other producers, while accelerating diversification efforts. At the same time, instability in the Strait of Hormuz and attacks on Red Sea shipping demonstrated the vulnerability of maritime energy routes on which Europe increasingly relies.

This evolving environment has revived debate surrounding EastMed. The project is

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issed solely as a pipeline transporting Eastern Mediterranean gas.

Increasingly, it is viewed as part of a broader strategic architecture linking the Eastern Mediterranean, Europe, and potentially Gulf energy corridors.

The debate therefore concerns more than gas supply. It concerns the relationship between energy infrastructure, maritime security, and European strategic autonomy.

Europe’s Post-Ukraine Energy Dilemma

Before 2022, Russian gas accounted for a substantial share of Europe’s energy consumption. The war in Ukraine forced European governments to reduce that dependence rapidly. LNG imports expanded dramatically, particularly from the United States and Qatar, while new terminals and interconnectors were developed across Europe.

This diversification improved Europe’s short-term resilience, but it did not eliminate structural vulnerability.

Unlike fixed pipelines, LNG supply chains depend heavily on maritime security, shipping capacity, insurance markets, and global spot pricing. Europe’s increasing dependence on LNG therefore shifted part of its vulnerability from continental pipelines toward maritime chokepoints and global shipping routes.

The Strait of Hormuz remains one of the world’s most sensitive strategic passages, through which a significant share of global oil and LNG exports transit. Similarly, attacks on commercial shipping in the Red Sea during 2024–2025 demonstrated how rapidly disruption in those corridors can affect energy flows and transportation costs.

Europe therefore replaced one form of strategic exposure with another. The challenge is no longer exclusively Russian dependency, but broader vulnerability to

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In that context, the Eastern Mediterranean acquired renewed strategic importance. Israeli and Cypriot offshore gas reserves represent one of the few relatively nearby non-Russian supply sources available to Europe from politically aligned states.

The Limits of the Egypt–LNG Alternative

At present, most Israeli gas exports destined for Europe transit through Egypt. Israeli gas is transported via existing pipeline infrastructure to Egyptian liquefaction facilities at Idku and Damietta before being exported to Europe as LNG.

This model offers several advantages. The infrastructure already exists, the route is commercially viable in the short term, and cooperation between Israel and Egypt has deepened considerably in recent years. Expansion projects at the Leviathan field further strengthened the export potential of this route.

Nevertheless, the Egyptian option also presents structural vulnerabilities.

Egypt itself faces growing domestic energy pressures. Rising internal demand and declining output from major fields such as Zohr increasingly constrain the country's export capacity. Egyptian LNG facilities cannot indefinitely guarantee stable export volumes if domestic shortages intensify.

The LNG model also remains dependent on maritime security through the Suez Canal and the Red Sea. Houthi attacks on shipping illustrated how rapidly disruption in those corridors can affect global trade and insurance costs.

Moreover, any interruption to Israeli offshore production immediately affects export capacity. Regional conflict has already demonstrated the vulnerability of Eastern Mediterranean energy infrastructure during periods of escalation.

For Europe, the Egyptian route therefore provides flexibility but not full strategic diversifies suppliers without fundamentally solving the problem of aritime instability.

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This distinction is central to understanding the renewed interest in EastMed.

EastMed's Geopolitical Logic

The EastMed project was designed precisely to reduce geopolitical dependence on unstable transit routes and external intermediaries.

The proposed pipeline would connect Israeli and Cypriot offshore gas fields to Greece through a roughly 1,900-kilometer subsea corridor, eventually linking into the broader European gas network through Greece and Italy. Initial planned capacity stands at approximately 10 bcm annually, with possible expansion to 20 bcm in later phases.

Technically, the project is considered feasible, despite the extraordinary depth and complexity of the route. The principal obstacle has never been engineering capability alone, but financing and political risk.

The geopolitical rationale behind EastMed is straightforward. Unlike LNG shipments through Egypt, the pipeline would bypass the Strait of Hormuz, reduce exposure to Red Sea instability, avoid excessive dependence on maritime transport, and diminish Turkish leverage over European energy connectivity. It would provide direct infrastructure linkage between Europe and Eastern Mediterranean suppliers aligned with the West.

For Israel, the project would deepen long-term economic integration with Europe while reducing dependence on a limited number of regional export routes. For Greece and Cyprus, EastMed strengthens their role as strategic energy gateways into Europe while reinforcing their maritime claims in the Eastern Mediterranean. For Europe, the project potentially creates a partially sovereign corridor linking allied Mediterranean producers directly to the European mainland.

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Turkey and Corridor Politics

No analysis of EastMed can ignore Turkey's role.

Ankara opposes the current pipeline route because it deliberately bypasses Turkish territory and challenges Turkey's ambition to position itself as the principal energy hub between Asia, the Middle East, and Europe.

From a purely commercial standpoint, Turkey's argument is not entirely unfounded. A pipeline connecting Israeli gas to Europe through Turkish territory would likely be shorter, cheaper, and technically simpler than EastMed.

However, EastMed's logic is not purely commercial.

Greece and Cyprus view Turkish regional policy with deep suspicion, particularly in light of disputes over maritime boundaries and Ankara's "Blue Homeland" doctrine. Israel, despite periods of rapprochement with Turkey, also recognizes the volatility of Turkish foreign policy and the risks associated with excessive strategic dependence.

EastMed therefore emerged partly as a geopolitical bypass project. Its purpose is not only to transport gas efficiently, but to avoid creating new forms of strategic leverage over European energy infrastructure.

This dynamic reflects a broader trend in international politics: infrastructure projects increasingly serve geopolitical and sovereignty objectives alongside economic ones.

Why the Project Remains Commercially Blocked

Despite its geopolitical rationale, EastMed still faces serious commercial and financial obstacles.

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ect costs currently range between €6 and €8 billion, potentially
lation, security requirements, and long-term financing costs are fully

incorporated. The combination of exceptional pipeline depth, seismic risks, and long construction timelines complicates investor confidence.

At the same time, Europe's long-term decarbonization strategy creates uncertainty regarding future gas demand. Many European actors remain reluctant to commit to multi-decade gas contracts extending toward 2045 or beyond while the EU officially targets carbon neutrality by 2050.

This creates a structural contradiction. Europe seeks diversification and resilience, yet markets remain reluctant to finance long-term gas infrastructure under uncertain future demand conditions.

Private investors alone are therefore unlikely to assume the political and financial risks associated with EastMed.

The project's future depends largely on whether European governments decide to classify strategic energy infrastructure differently from ordinary commercial investments.

From Commercial Project to Strategic Infrastructure

The central issue surrounding EastMed is whether Europe treats energy infrastructure as a commercial investment or as a strategic security asset.

If evaluated solely according to immediate commercial profitability, the project may remain difficult to justify relative to LNG alternatives or Turkish transit routes.

However, strategic infrastructure is often financed for reasons extending beyond short-term market efficiency. Europe already invests heavily in defense systems, digital sovereignty, cybersecurity, and critical infrastructure resilience precisely because market logic alone does not fully account for geopolitical vulnerability.

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asingly belongs in that category.

The project could also acquire additional long-term relevance through adaptation to hydrogen transport and broader Mediterranean energy interconnectivity. While such scenarios remain uncertain, they strengthen the argument that EastMed should be viewed as long-term strategic infrastructure rather than as a temporary gas export project.

Such a transformation would likely require sovereign guarantees, stronger European Investment Bank involvement, long-term regulatory commitments, public-private financing mechanisms, and integration into wider European resilience strategies.

Without such political reclassification, EastMed will probably remain trapped in permanent diplomatic support without concrete implementation.

Policy Recommendations

European governments should stop treating EastMed exclusively as a commercial project and begin evaluating it through the lens of strategic resilience and infrastructure sovereignty. The European Union should therefore expand sovereign financial guarantees and integrate Eastern Mediterranean energy security into a broader maritime and geopolitical strategy that also includes LNG diversification, nuclear energy, and renewable transition policies.

Israel, for its part, should continue expanding offshore production capacity while maintaining export diversification and deepening strategic coordination with Greece and Cyprus on energy and maritime security. Eastern Mediterranean energy cooperation should also be integrated into wider connectivity discussions linking Europe and the Middle East.

Greece and Cyprus should continue strengthening trilateral institutional mechanisms with Israel while accelerating complementary infrastructure projects forcing regional connectivity and maritime resilience.

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The United States also retains an important role. Washington has an interest in supporting stable regional partnerships involving Israel, Greece, and Cyprus while encouraging diversification within Europe’s energy architecture rather than excessive concentration in LNG dependence alone.

Conclusion

The future of EastMed remains uncertain. The project still faces substantial financial, technical, environmental, and geopolitical obstacles, and its implementation timeline is likely far longer than many official declarations suggest.

Yet the strategic debate surrounding EastMed has changed fundamentally since the beginning of the decade.

The war in Ukraine, instability in the Gulf, and repeated disruptions to maritime trade routes have all demonstrated that energy security cannot be evaluated solely through short-term commercial calculations. Infrastructure resilience, transit diversification, and geopolitical redundancy increasingly matter as much as immediate price competitiveness.

EastMed is therefore unlikely to succeed as a conventional market-driven project alone. Its viability depends on whether Europe ultimately concludes that strategic energy sovereignty requires investment in long-term infrastructure connecting allied producers directly to the continent.

The core question is no longer whether EastMed is the cheapest option available under ideal market conditions. The question is whether Europe believes reducing future geopolitical vulnerability is worth the cost of building strategic alternatives before the next major energy crisis emerges.

Ambassador of Israel to Japan