

Turkish-Hungarian Energy Cooperation

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Abstract

Today, energy supply has become a key issue for all of Europe. The world's population has grown significantly over recent decades, reaching 8 billion in 2022, and it could reach 9 billion by 2037. This growth also impacts energy demand. Some forecasts indicate that global energy demand will increase by a staggering 50 percent by 2050.

Europe does not have sufficient energy resources to meet its growing energy needs and, therefore, relies on energy imports. The European Council has set ambitious targets for 2030—through increased commitments—to enable the EU to develop a more competitive, secure, and sustainable energy system. The closest major resources are in the Middle East and Central Asia, from where energy resources are transported to Europe through various routes. Transportation of energy resources via pipelines is the most environmentally and economically favourable option; however, the Russia-Ukraine war has closed northern land routes, meaning that viable land routes now pass through Turkey into Europe, including to Hungary.

Hungary has especially limited energy resources, making energy cooperation with Turkey crucial. In December 2023, Hungary and Turkey entered into a strategic partnership, which the Hungarian prime minister described as the closest form of friendship, brotherhood, and political cooperation in diplomatic terms. He also emphasized that during Hungary's EU presidency, it will make every effort to modernize the customs union between the EU and Turkey and support Turkey in its visa liberalization efforts. In connection with the agreement, the Hungarian prime minister also noted that, in terms of energy security, Hungary and Turkey have agreed not only to transport natural gas through Turkey but also to purchase it from Turkey. In my presentation, I intend to highlight the significance of Turkish-Hungarian energy cooperation.

To understand the importance of Turkish-Hungarian energy cooperation, we must also recognize that Turkey's accession to the European Union and the potential future of its integration remain unresolved issues. Turkey first submitted its application to join the European Economic Community in 1959, but full membership, as well as the timing of such, remains uncertain to this day. In fact, full membership

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Keywords: Hungary, Turkey, Energy, Europe

Introduction

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The relevance of this topic is underscored by the fact that the 18-month programme of the Council's rotating presidency includes an objective for the 'presidency trio to pursue a relationship with Turkey based on cooperation and mutual benefits, within the framework defined by the European Council.'⁴

¹ Zaharia, Alina, Diaconeasa, Maria Claudia, Brad, Laura, Lădaru, Georgiana-Raluca és Ioanăş, Corina: "Factors Influencing Energy Consumption in the Context of Sustainable Development", *Sustainability*, 11., no. 15. (2019): 4147. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su11154147>

² EPA. United States Environmental Protection Agency, "State CO2 Emissions from Fossil Fuel Combustion", <https://www.epa.gov/statelocalenergy/state-co2-emissions-fossil-fuel-combustion> (accessed 11 October 2024)

³ István Takács: "A megújuló és nem megújuló energiahordozókra alapozott erőművi technológiák energiamegtérülési rátája és externáliái (CO2)" [Energy Return Rates and Externalities (CO2) of Power Plant Technologies Based on Renewable and Non-Renewable Energy Sources], In: *Tér-Gazdaság-Ember*, 3., no. 1. (2015): pp. 91–106.

⁴ <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-10597-2023-INIT/hu/pdf> (accessed 03 September 2024)

Turkey remains an important partner for Europe today and will continue to play a key role in the future of Europe, regardless of when it may gain full entry into the organization of European integration.⁵

Since the 2010s, in a changed geopolitical environment, Turkey has gained particular significance for the stability of the European energy and security system. Therefore, Turkey's future role in integration and the further strengthening of Turkish-Hungarian energy cooperation are of paramount importance for the entire European Union. In my study, I will examine the significance of Turkish-Hungarian energy cooperation.

Turkish-Hungarian Relations

My research is particularly timely, as December 18, 2023, marked the 100th anniversary of the signing of the Turkish-Hungarian Friendship Treaty. Modern diplomatic relations between Hungary and Turkey began in 1923, as Turkey was one of the first countries to sign a friendship and cooperation agreement with Hungary following Hungary's international isolation after the Treaty of Trianon.⁶ Today, strong economic ties exist between the two countries. On Hungary's national holiday on August 20, 2023, President Erdogan visited Hungary, with discussions emphasizing Turkish-Hungarian economic relations as a priority topic.⁷ After the meeting, President Erdogan noted that Turkish-Hungarian trade had already reached \$3.5 billion in 2022, with a future goal of achieving a trade volume of \$6 billion.⁸

Turkey's strategic importance is paramount in examining EU-Turkey relations. The EU continues to develop a common foreign and security policy, making it crucial to establish, enhance, and pursue effective economic and political strategies concerning the situation in Middle Eastern countries and the Mediterranean region. In this regard, Turkey plays a key role, as its economic ties, political structure, and geographic location create a bridge between Europe and Asia. Turkey has become a perfect diplomatic representative of Western interests in the Arab world. For the EU, Turkey is of geopolitical significance as direct access to oil from the Persian Gulf and Iraq, as well as natural gas and finished products from the region, remains a high priority. Turkey's development has reached a level where it is seen as a model of democracy in the Arab world.⁹

Quoting Vecdet Erkun, former dean of the Faculty of Agriculture at Ankara University and founding president of the Turkish-Hungarian Friendship Association in Ankara: 'Few nations have such ancient ties reaching back to the earliest historical times as the Turks of Central Asian origin and the Hungarians. These ties are studied at universities and cultural institutions in terms of language, history, and the arts, enriched by new discoveries. At the same time, experts from both countries cooperate in science, culture, trade, and defense within the framework of bilateral agreements.'¹⁰ In my opinion, these renowned words aptly reflect that Turkish-Hungarian relations date back to ancient times and remain steadfast to this day.

⁵ For more on Turkish-EU integration and Turkey's economic situation, see: Adrienn Prieger: *Economic Development in Turkey*. https://www.matarka.hu/koz/ISSN_1588-6735/GTK_vol_11_no_1_2015_eng/ISSN_1588-6735_vol_11_no1_2015_eng_060-070.pdf (accessed 05 October 2024);

Adrienn Dóra Dr. Prieger, doctoral dissertation:

https://corvina.kre.hu/phd/Prieger_disszertacio-10.24395_KRE.2018.004.pdf (accessed 17 October 2024)

⁶ <https://magyarnemzet.hu/kulfold/2023/03/novak-katalin-ot-pontban-vazolta-fel-a-beke-fele-vezeto-utat> (accessed 01 September 2023)

⁷ <https://www.vg.hu/kozelet/2023/08/erdogan-a-hazauton-magyarorszag-soros-elnoksege-indithatja-el-torokorszag-unios-csatlakozasat> (accessed 1 September 2023)

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ https://corvina.kre.hu/phd/Prieger_tezis_magyar-10.24395_KRE.2018.004.pdf (accessed 2 September 2023)

¹⁰ Vecdet Erkun: Magyarországról és a magyarokról – Visszaemlékezés, Magyar Tudomány, 2011/4. 424.

Following the tensions of the 14th to 17th centuries, Turkish-Hungarian friendship reemerged as early as the 18th and 19th centuries, when the Ottoman Empire offered refuge to Imre Thököly, Ferenc II Rákóczi, Lajos Kossuth, Józef Bem, and thousands of Hungarian exiles. The Austrian and Russian governments demanded the extradition of Kossuth and the exiles, but Sultan Abdülmecid I, citing the right of hospitality, refused these requests, even at the risk of war.¹¹ During his time in Turkey, Kossuth learned Turkish and drafted a proposal for Hungary's new constitution.¹² Sultan Abdul Hamid II later returned part of the Corvinas that were kept in King Matthias's private library and had been taken to Istanbul as war spoils during the reign of Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent.¹³

This friendship grew significantly stronger after World War I, a defeat shared by both countries, when Western powers attempted to force Hungary and Turkey to sign humiliating peace treaties tantamount to destruction. It is no surprise, then, that Turkey, led by Kemal Atatürk and successful in its independence struggles against Western powers, was one of the first countries to sign a friendship treaty with Hungary on December 18, 1923, during Hungary's period of international isolation caused by the Treaty of Trianon.¹⁴

Emre Saral, a research assistant at Hacettepe University in Ankara, highlighted in a lecture at Ludovika University that 'on Atatürk's orders, a Hungarian Studies Institute was established within the Faculty of Language, History, and Geography in Ankara, with the renowned Turkologist László Rásonyi as its first lecturer. Esteemed Turkish professors such as Hasan Eren, Şerif Baştav, Tayyip Gökbilgin, Sami Özerdim, and İbrahim Kafesoğlu studied there, contributing significantly to the development of Turkish social sciences and becoming fluent in Hungarian. This reflects Atatürk's vision and his high regard for Hungary.¹⁵

In last November, after talks with Prime Minister Viktor Orbán in Ankara, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan highlighted that '2024 will be the shared cultural year of Turkey and Hungary.' President Erdogan expressed gratitude to Hungary for its international support of Turkey, particularly in consistently backing its EU accession negotiations. Hungarian-Turkish relations have strengthened, as evidenced by the mutual goal of increasing annual trade volume between the two countries from \$4 billion to \$6 billion. In 2018, Hungarian-Turkish relations reached a higher level when Hungary joined the Organization of Turkic States as an observer, an organization where Turkey is a founding member and plays a leading role.¹⁶

During his visit to Ankara in May, Péter Szijjártó, Hungary's Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade, stated that without Turkey, a secure energy supply for Hungary would not be guaranteed. He also noted that the TurkStream pipeline is currently the only reliably functioning east-west energy transport infrastructure in all of Europe, making it of critical importance.¹⁷

Energy policy in the EU

¹¹ <https://www.ludovika.hu/magazin/eloado/2023/05/03/kossuth-torokorszagi-hagyateka/> (accessed 25 October 2023)

¹² <https://rodosto.hu/hu/kutahya.html> (accessed 26 October 2023)

¹³ <https://www.ludovika.hu/magazin/muhely/2023/02/15/ludovika-szabadegyetem-a-ket-vilaghaboru-kozotti-torok-magyar-kapcsolatok/> (accessed 28 October 2023)

¹⁴ <https://mki.gov.hu/hu/hirek-hu/minden-hir-hu/a-trianoni-bekediktatum-okozta-nemzetkozi-elszigeteltseg-utan-torokorszag-az-elsok-kozott-kotott-magyarorszaggal-baratsagi-es-egyuttmukodesi-szerzodest-1923-ban> (accessed 25 October 2023)

¹⁵ <https://www.ludovika.hu/magazin/muhely/2023/02/15/ludovika-szabadegyetem-a-ket-vilaghaboru-kozotti-torok-magyar-kapcsolatok/> (accessed 29 October 2023)

¹⁶ <https://mki.gov.hu/hu/hirek-hu/sajto-hu/szazeves-evfordulojat-unnepeljuk-a-magyar-torok-kapcsolatoknak> (accessed 5 November 2023)

¹⁷ <https://magyarnemzet.hu/kulfold/2023/08/torokorszag-a-kapcsolat-kelet-es-nyugat-kozott> (accessed 6 September 2023)

Turkey's energy policy is heavily influenced by its geographical position at the intersection of the Caspian region, Central Asia, the Middle East, and Europe, surrounded by energy-rich areas suitable for oil and natural gas production. These regions are estimated to hold about 70% of the world's total energy reserves.¹⁸ Turkey holds a strategic position in energy, acting as a corridor that links the energy-hungry Western markets with the energy-producing Eastern markets that significantly influence global energy supply. An interesting example is that the EU possesses only 2% of the world's natural gas reserves, while consuming 17% of global production. In contrast, Turkey's eastern "neighbors"—Iran, Russia, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan—hold 47% of the world's gas reserves.¹⁹

The importance of energy was already recognized immediately after World War II, when the founding fathers of the European Union decided that, as Jean Monnet put it, "the tools of war must be turned to the service of peace." The first European treaties specifically addressed coal and steel production as well as nuclear energy: one established the European Coal and Steel Community, which was integrated into EU energy policy in 2002, and the other created the European Atomic Energy Community, which remains in force to this day.²⁰ However, the Treaty of Rome did not include a separate chapter on energy policy. Energy policy only emerged as an independent policy area with the Lisbon Treaty, which granted the European Union shared competencies in energy matters.²¹

EU energy policy is shaped by principles such as competitiveness, security of supply, and sustainability. Its objectives include ensuring the functioning of the energy market and the security of energy supply within the European Union, promoting energy efficiency and conservation, developing renewable energy sources, and interconnecting energy networks.²² The current European energy policy is based on the strategy for the Energy Union, which also mentions Turkey: "As part of the renewed European energy and climate diplomacy, the EU will use all foreign policy instruments to establish strategic energy partnerships with increasingly important producer and transit countries and regions, such as Algeria and Turkey, Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan, the Middle East, Africa, and other potential suppliers."²³

The European Commission publishes an annual report on the Energy Union, measuring EU progress toward achieving the objectives of the Energy Union, the REPowerEU plan, and the clean energy transition, in alignment with energy and climate goals. According to the 2024 report on the state of the Energy Union, progress is evident in several areas, including renewable energy production, reflecting the EU's performance.²⁴

Turkish-Hungarian Energy Cooperation

Energy policy has always been a crucial geopolitical issue, and the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian war has made this even more evident to the entire world. One of the European Union's key objectives is to

¹⁸ Tamás Dudlák (2017) *Törökország helye az Európai Unió, Oroszország és Azerbajdzsán közti gázjátszmában*. [Turkey's Position in the Gas Game Between the European Union, Russia, and Azerbaijan] In: *Világpolitika*, 2 (1). p. 62.

¹⁹ Karan (2014)- Küçüközmen - KARAN, Mehmet Baha- Küçüközmen, C. Coskun - AKTÜRK, Arif: Re-examining Turkey's Potential of Becoming a Natural Gas Transit Hub. In: Dorsman, A. et al. (eds.): *Perspectives on Energy Risk*, Springer, 2014, p. 120.

²⁰ http://eta.bibl.u-szeged.hu/2671/5/11.6.4%20-%20energia-DOC_1.hu.pdf (accessed 18 October 2024)

²¹ https://edit.elte.hu/xmlui/bitstream/handle/10831/34603/Themis_2015_jun_Suto_Timea_p_376-407.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y (accessed 18 October 2024)

²² <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/hu/sheet/68/energiapolitika-altalanos-elvek> (accessed 18 October 2024)

²³ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/HU/TXT/?uri=COM:2015:80:FIN> (accessed 18 October 2024)

²⁴ <https://www.ludovika.hu/blogok/ot-perc-europa-blog/2024/09/27/folyamatos-az-elorelepes-az-eu-energiapolitikajaban/> (accessed 18 October 2024)

eliminate its dependence on energy imports from Russia by 2027 and enhance its diversification options. As a result, rapid changes in the global energy market can be expected.

In June 2022, the EU signed a trilateral agreement with Egypt and Israel regarding Europe's LNG supply.²⁵ The joint communication titled "The EU's External Energy Engagement in a Changing World" by the European Parliament, the Council of the European Union, the European Economic and Social Committee, and the European Committee of the Regions also emphasizes energy security and the diversification of energy supply.²⁶ Additionally, the document highlights that the European Union will support regional cooperation in the Eastern and Southern Mediterranean regions to facilitate the energy transition and unlock the potential of renewable energy sources.²⁷

The gas fields discovered in the Eastern Mediterranean hold significant potential, contributing to Europe's energy transition and diversification efforts. The current geopolitical crisis also presents the European Union with an opportunity to mend its recently strained relations with Turkey. To achieve this, the EU needs to intensify its mediating efforts to ease tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean conflict.²⁸ Hungary's long-term Energy Strategy through 2030 highlights ensuring sustainable energy supply as one of the most significant strategic challenges of the 21st century.²⁹

April 1, 2024, marked a milestone in Hungarian-Turkish energy cooperation, as natural gas deliveries from Turkey to Hungary began.³⁰ Péter Szijjártó emphasized that Hungary became the first non-neighbouring country to which Turkey exports natural gas. Previously, Turkey already played an essential role in Hungary's energy security as a transit route, but now it also serves as a source country.³¹ Szijjártó also noted: "We are strengthening our cooperation in the field of nuclear energy as well, given that the soon-to-be operational Turkish nuclear power plant is being built using the same technology as the new Paks plant. The experience gained during the Turkish construction will assist us, and Turkish experts will support their Hungarian counterparts in the technical inspection of long-manufacturing-time equipment."³²

In the summer of 2024, during the summit of the Organization of Turkic States in Shusha, Azerbaijan, Szijjártó highlighted the record-breaking trade volume between Hungary and Turkey, which exceeded \$4 billion last year. He added: "Our cooperation with Turkey contributes to Hungary's energy security, as we became the first non-neighbouring country to which Turkey exports natural gas this year."³³ He further stated that discussions are ongoing to extend energy cooperation into oil extraction and nuclear energy. Szijjártó announced plans to convene the EU-Turkey Association Council during Hungary's EU presidency and expressed the intention to modernize the EU-Turkey Customs Union and advance visa facilitation efforts to strengthen trade cooperation.³⁴

²⁵ <https://hvia.hu/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/4-Csorba.pdf> (accessed 25 September 2024)

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Nemzeti Energiestratégia 2030 [National Energy Strategy 2030], <https://2010-2014.kormany.hu/download/e/19/40000/Energiastrategia.pdf> (accessed 17 October 2024)

³⁰ <https://hirado.hu/kulfold/cikk/2024/03/25/szijjarto-peter-aprilis-1-jevel-indul-a-torok-magyar-foldgaszallitas> (accessed 17 October 2024)

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ <https://kormany.hu/hirek/magyarorszag-es-torokorszag-egyuttmukodese-egy-igazi-sikertortenet> (accessed 1 October 2024)

³⁴ Ibid.

In its program for Hungary's presidency of the Council of the European Union in the second half of 2024, Hungary emphasized that Turkey is an indispensable partner for the EU in several areas, such as energy security, ensuring regional stability, and combating illegal migration. Following the conclusions of the European Council, the Hungarian presidency will aim to inject new momentum into deepening strategic cooperation in areas of shared interest and advancing EU-Turkey political dialogue, while also taking Turkey's candidate status into account.

The presidency attaches great importance to restarting and advancing comprehensive settlement talks on Cyprus, which could further strengthen the future development of EU-Turkey cooperation.³⁵

Conclusion

The EU's energy policy aims to ensure the security of energy supply for its member states, promote energy efficiency and conservation, and increase the share of renewable energy sources.³⁶ The Russian-Ukrainian war, which broke out in 2022, created a new energy market situation. In response, the European Commission introduced the REPowerEU plan, aimed at significantly reducing the EU's dependence on Russian gas and oil before 2030.³⁷ Turkey, along with Turkish-Hungarian energy cooperation, could have significant impacts on achieving these objectives.

Article 11 of the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation between Hungary and the Republic of Turkey, promulgated by Government Decree 85/2015 (IV. 9.), establishes that "the Parties endeavor to cooperate in the field of energy. The Parties aim to promote developments serving mutual interests, including electricity and natural gas projects. The Parties also seek to share their legal and regulatory experiences and knowledge in the field of nuclear energy"³⁸ This highlights the growing emphasis on strengthening Turkish-Hungarian energy cooperation.

In my opinion, Turkish-EU relations, particularly Turkish-Hungarian economic and energy cooperation, hold extraordinary importance today. Turkey's geopolitical significance and economic role demand a strong partnership, both in Turkish-EU and Turkish-Hungarian relations. During Hungary's 2024 EU presidency, a key priority remains identifying and solidifying alliances, both within and outside the EU. Turkey, a key player for the entire EU, represents an essential partner for Hungary in establishing strategic partnerships.

As Péter Szijjártó, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade, stated: "The construction of the TurkStream pipeline was the most significant step for Hungarian energy security in recent years." He also emphasized: "We owe thanks to our Turkish friends, who not only cooperated with us to build this pipeline but have since acted as a reliable transit country, enabling the delivery of 20 million cubic meters of gas daily. As a result, we have already been able to purchase more gas via TurkStream this year than in the entire previous year."³⁹

³⁵ <https://hungarian-presidency.consilium.europa.eu/media/1zbt2e2b/2024-masodik-felevi-magyar-elnokseg-programja.pdf> (accessed 15 October 2024)

³⁶ Nándor Bozsik, Tamás Tánzos and Norbert Bozsik: *Az EU megújuló energiaforrásainak szerepe az energiafüggőség csökkentésében* [The Role of Renewable Energy Sources in Reducing the EU's Energy Dependence] In: *Külügyi Szemle*, 2024/2. vol. 23, p.12.

³⁷ *Ibid.* p.13.

³⁸ <https://net.jogtar.hu/jogszabaly?docid=a1500085.kor> (accessed 17 October 2024)

³⁹ <https://kormany.hu/hirek/az-elmult-evok-legfontosabb-lepese-a-magyar-energiabiztonsag-szemponyjabol-a-torok-aramlat-vezetek-megepitese-volt> (accessed 18 October 2024)

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