

# THE DAILY STAR

LEBANON

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## Cabinet to review maritime boundaries

BEIRUT: A maritime demarcation committee has recommended that the Cabinet begin discussions to revise Lebanon's Exclusive Economic Zone in order to move forward with exploration of natural gas and oil deposits in waters off the country's coast. According to the committee, which was tasked by Foreign Minister Adnan Mansour with examining the government's options in light of disputes over territorial waters in the Eastern Mediterranean, the Cabinet should establish a team to hold discussions in order to propose a new EEZ.

This would allow Lebanon to put forward its own proposals for a boundary including the country's maritime territory, the committee said.

"The study would enable the state to base the project on scientific and fixed foundations to negotiate with any other country over its maritime border," the foreign minister said in comments published in *As-Safir* newspaper.

Mansour will discuss the issue when the Cabinet convenes next Wednesday at the Grand Serail.

The item was added to the agenda only after Speaker Nabih Berri, who has been an outspoken proponent of the country exploiting its natural maritime resources, was critical that the report had not been scheduled for discussions, according to Cabinet sources.

Putting forward a new EEZ proposal would also allow oil investment to move forward, drawing global investors and allowing Lebanon to exercise its rights in its national waters, while leaving the door open for future discussions on official maritime boundaries.

The EEZ would also act as a maritime Blue Line, tempering tensions over the disputed waters.

The option is favored by Cyprus, which contends that a formal agreement on maritime boundaries can be reached later, allowing Nicosia to begin its own and joint oil exploration ventures.

Lebanon reached an EEZ agreement with Cyprus in 2007 but has not ratified the agreement, saying it would not do so until an EEZ boundary with Israel is reached.

Lebanon proposed a southern boundary of its EEZ to the United Nations in 2010, but under a bilateral agreement between Israel and Cyprus, which was reached months later, Israel's EEZ infringes on roughly 850 square kilometers of sea that Lebanon considers within its EEZ.

Last year Parliament endorsed a draft law demarcating the country's maritime boundaries with Israel and Cyprus and, months later, Israel mapped out its own maritime boundary overlapping

with Lebanon's.

At stake is a treasure trove of natural resources that could be worth billions of dollars. In 2010, the U.S. Geological Survey estimated that the Levantine Basin in the eastern Mediterranean, which includes the territorial waters of Lebanon, Israel, Syria and Cyprus, could hold as much as 1.7 billion barrels of recoverable oil and 34.5 trillion cubic meters of gas.

The policy to review Lebanon's EEZ was one of two policies discussed in the report.

The other option would be for the government to stand firm on its official maritime boundaries, which would hold up investment activities and could also lead to tension because of the ongoing dispute.

The committee warned that revisions to the proposal should be careful not offer too large of a compromise of the Lebanon's waters.

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25/08/2012