

# **CIFE Studies: The EU in World Politics**

**VOLUME 1**

## ***The EU and the Eastern Mediterranean: The Multilateral Dialogue Option***

*edited by George N. Tzogopoulos*

*with a Preface by Ambassador Nikolaus Meyer-Landrut*

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# Prologue

## AMBASSADOR NIKOLAUS MEYER-LANDRUT

*Ambassador Nikolaus Meyer-Landrut is Head of the European Union Delegation to Turkey.*

Due to its unique geography, the Eastern Mediterranean has always been of huge geopolitical importance. Located at the crossroads of three continents, the Eastern Mediterranean was home to many world civilisations and great empires over thousands of years and has been the world's centre for many centuries. Still today, the region is of high strategic and geopolitical importance as the Eastern Mediterranean region brings together many different countries, religions and cultures.

For the European Union, the geopolitical importance of the Eastern Mediterranean is unequivocal. The Eastern Mediterranean connects Europe with Asia and Africa. Any change in this region directly affects the European Union. The region's high strategic geopolitical importance is reflected in the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy.

The European Union seeks to ensure regional political stability and reduce security concerns in the region. Given the geographical situation and the current tensions in the region, ensuring regional stability requires the involvement and constructive efforts of all parties involved. To this end, multilateral talks offer great possibilities. As part of the way forward, a multilateral framework could serve as an important instrument to keep the dialogue between countries in the region ongoing while at the same time dissuade those countries from taking unilateral actions that would undermine their relationships. Multilateral dialogue additionally contributes to rebuilding trust between countries involved. The presence of trust is an absolute prerequisite for any lasting solution. Multilateral talks also help take away misperceptions and as such improve relationships in the region.

At the same time, it is necessary to realise that the multilateral dialogue format can only be part of the solution. Looking at the issues at stake, some can only be resolved bilaterally due to their nature. Where multilateral dialogue offers the possibility to exchange positions and rebuild trust, some issues can only be resolved between parties who are directly involved. Resolving legal maritime boundary delimitation disputes or finding a solution for the Cyprus settlement are examples whereby final agreements could only be reached bilaterally. As such, within a multilateral dialogue framework, there should be ample room and recognition that some issues are better off being addressed bilaterally or between a smaller group of countries. Therefore, it is of high importance that all talks take place at the appropriate level and within the best suited framework or forum, which can be bilateral, multilateral or UN-sponsored.

From my perspective as the EU Ambassador to Turkey, I am convinced that there is enough common ground between countries in the Eastern Mediterranean region to work from. This common ground should be the starting point for further talks and negotiations. The European Union stands ready to support all dialogues on core issues within the Eastern Mediterranean. The European Union can as a third-party play an active role by bringing together countries involved and support the negotiation process to find lasting solutions. As such, I am delighted to endorse this comprehensive book about the European Union and the Eastern Mediterranean. Understanding all perspectives and thereby taking away harmful misperceptions is an important first step towards rebuilding trust and finding lasting solutions.

## About the Publication

### GEORGE N. TZOGOPOULOS

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Following its special meeting of 1 and 2 October 2020, the European Council called for a multilateral conference on the Eastern Mediterranean and invited the High Representative Josep Borrell to engage in talks about its organisation. Modalities such as participation, scope and timeline would need to be agreed with all involved parties. The conference could address issues on which multilateral solutions are needed, including maritime delimitation, security, energy, migration and economic cooperation.<sup>1</sup> High Representative Borrell was asked by the European Council to take forward the proposal in December 2020<sup>2</sup> and March 2021.<sup>3</sup> As he mentioned in his March 2021 report about EU-Turkey relations, he had already started the preparatory work but clear reactions from potential participants outlined difficulties in organising such a multilateral conference in the short-term.<sup>4</sup>

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- 1 European Council website, Special Meeting of the European Council, Conclusions, [www.consilium.europa.eu/media/45910/021020-euco-final-conclusions.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/45910/021020-euco-final-conclusions.pdf), 2 October 2020.
  - 2 European Council website, European Council Meeting, Conclusions, [www.consilium.europa.eu/media/47296/1011-12-20-euco-conclusions-en.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/47296/1011-12-20-euco-conclusions-en.pdf), 11 December 2020.
  - 3 European Council website, Statement of the Members of the European Council, [www.consilium.europa.eu/media/48976/250321-vtc-euco-statement-en.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/48976/250321-vtc-euco-statement-en.pdf), 25 March 2021.
  - 4 European Commission website, Joint Communication to the European Council: State of Play of EU-Turkey Political, Economic and Trade Relations, [eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52021JC0008&from=EN](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52021JC0008&from=EN), 22 March 2021.

CIFE publishes the special volume *The EU and the Eastern Mediterranean: The Multilateral Dialogue Option* in the hope of contributing to creative thinking as long as High Representative Borrell continues the preparatory work. By inviting experts, journalists and scholars from several countries, this volume analyses several priorities in the Eastern Mediterranean Basin from the prism of different countries and perspectives. The richness of presented views and arguments itself outlines the arduous task in defining the agenda of a multilateral conference, the participants as well as the process. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict, civil wars in Libya and Syria, the Cyprus question, Greek-Turkish spats, instability in Lebanon especially after the August 2020 Beirut explosion, energy disagreements, and political wrangling among different actors arguably render the initiative a non-starter from the beginning. Dissipation might be the result of the European diplomatic effort due to conflicting interests of interested parties in the Eastern Mediterranean.

In spite of existing problems, dialogue always helps and, when multilateral, offers a holistic approach in the effort to respond to them. Even if compromises can hardly be reached in a complex regional and international environment, cooperation remains catalytic due to the nature of ongoing challenges, principally the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change. Contributors to this volume acknowledge difficulties but endeavour to go beyond them by proposing how a potential EU-led multilateral dialogue in the Eastern Mediterranean could achieve common goals. In the final account, such a type of dialogue also constitutes an opportunity for the EU. After the end of the Cold War, the US has patiently waited for Europe to undertake responsibilities in some regional hotspots. Taking the foreign policy priorities of Washington into account – mainly its focus on Russia and China – the EU envisions now acting strategically and delivering in the Eastern Mediterranean in order to create peaceful and economically sound conditions that will unleash extensive cooperation among different actors – notwithstanding disagreements.

# Lebanon-EU Relations – Common Values and the Urgent Need for a Long-Term Approach

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Lebanon's relations with the European Union (EU) and more broadly with European Member States on a bilateral level is the result of long historical process through the role played in the Mediterranean region by the successive entities ruling what is nowadays called Lebanon. This relationship has been one of academic, intellectual and trade exchanges which have lasted for over two thousand years. The name of the European continent itself originates from this relationship between Lebanon and the northern shore of the Mediterranean. Currently and since 2012, the EU is Lebanon's first trading partner with commercial exchanges between the two reaching over 36% of the Cedar country's total trade in 2017<sup>5</sup>. There also around 400,000 Lebanese individuals residing in Europe<sup>6</sup> and a large number of Europeans including bi-nationals living and working in Lebanon, facilitating exchanges between the two.

The Mediterranean identity of Lebanon does not undermine its belonging to its Arab environment and its deep cultural, political and economic involvement in it. The preeminence of Gulf countries where a significant number of Lebanese citizens live and work has been

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5 EU website, available at: [ec.europa.eu/trade/policy/countries-and-regions/countries/lebanon/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/trade/policy/countries-and-regions/countries/lebanon/index_en.htm).

6 French Ministry of Europe and of Foreign Affairs website, available at: [www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/dossiers-pays/liban/presentation-du-liban](http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/dossiers-pays/liban/presentation-du-liban).

a key source of income for Lebanon, mainly through remittances, and confirms the necessity for the country to maintain and develop its relations with its Arab partners. The tension between these two non-exclusive identities has shaped the challenges Lebanon has met to form a cohesive foreign policy and reflects competing domestic interests. However, the objective of this article is not to address the complex issue of the Lebanese cultural identity but rather to shed the light on the drivers of Lebanese national interest formulation.

## **Shifting Global and Regional Landscapes**

With the acceleration of globalisation and the continuing political, foreign policy and socio-economic transformations in Middle Eastern societies, Lebanon will have to make crucial decisions in defining where its national interest lies. The transformations taking place in the Middle East reflect global trends including rising socioeconomic inequalities, populism as well as the emergence of new powers, namely China and India, or the reaffirmation of Russian foreign policy ambitions. The power shift both globally and in the Middle East could lead to competing political models. The Chinese model has seduced similar political systems globally and a wide number of citizens at a time where traditional democracies are entangled in existential crises. In the Middle East, the inconsistencies of Western foreign policies as well as American military involvement in the region have sent diverging messages and have undermined public discourse around democratic development, rule of law and accountability in political spheres.

Lebanon is not exempt from this. Recent declarations by the government as well as prominent political figures suggesting a shifting of interest towards the “East”, mainly towards China, reflects this trend. The absence or limited political accountability related to economic assistance witnessed in developing countries where China has significantly invested, particularly in infrastructure,

has encouraged some Lebanese leaders to seek support from Beijing. However, Chinese authorities have so far been cautious in their relation to the Near East and the political instability that has characterised it in recent years. Nevertheless, China has recently been extending its support to the Lebanese government on several occasions, from addressing the country's energy crisis to the management of the coronavirus pandemic. This light but noticeable involvement could reveal China's long-term ambition in the region.

While displaying democratic features such as a relative degree of freedom of expression, currently under serious threat, Lebanon has distinguished itself from the relatively monolithic nature of some of its neighbours' political systems. These freedoms have enabled, throughout time, a high degree of academic, artistic and business creativity which made Lebanon unique despite its internal fragmentation and strifes. These open spaces, through an unprecedented economic crisis fuelled by the resilience of a political class dominated by corruption and an illiberal worldview, are rapidly shrinking. Consequently, a part of Lebanon's identity, this culture of openness, is at risk.

In an international environment where political liberalism has been challenged, the EU remains one of the key liberal havens. At the same time, the Biden Administration emphasis on democracy promotion in the West and beyond, contrasts with the policy of the previous one. It would take significant efforts to restore trust in democratic governance in the Middle East but the 2019 Lebanese political and social uprising, despite a slowdown, has demonstrated the appetite of the country's middle class for democratic governance, at odds with any authoritarian rule.

Together with a dynamic civil society, Lebanon has, throughout its modern history, been an active supporter of multilateralism, in a striking contrast with its current isolation on the regional and global stage. A founding member of the United Nations, it has been seeking

membership in most international organisations and has engaged in trade cooperation with its key commercial partners such as the EU with an Association Agreement signed in 2002 and its Arab trade partners, mainly in the Gulf. Lebanon's dependence on trade makes it vulnerable to trade instability. More recently, the country has been dependent on international aid not due to the events it went through. In this context, the start of the Biden Administration also means a revived US support for a multilateralist approach to international relations through a renewed transatlantic partnership despite some divergence, including in the Middle East. As a result, the EU, which has been the most active proponent of multilateralism globally through its support to international governance, could find the support it has lacked from under the last US Administration. It would also feel less constrained in its support for better governance in its neighbourhood.

## **The Way Forward**

As a close partner to Lebanon on the cultural, political and economic levels, the EU has the capacity to support Lebanon's democratic aspirations, widely expressed since 2015 with the emergence of a nation-wide social movement to address corruption and culminating with the 2019 uprising. The delivery of aid and economic support has been made conditional on political, governance and economic reform, which is not taking place anytime soon. The same approach has been adopted by key Member States such as France, as well as multilateral organisations which include the World Bank and the IMF. While legitimate in nature, this approach generates the risk of a further deterioration of the Lebanese people's already disastrous socio-economic conditions. In a political environment dominated by impunity and unwillingness to reform, such an approach only strengthens the ruling political class, weakens the middle class which is the backbone of civil society in Lebanon, and undermines aspirations to a more liberal political system.

While the EU and multilateral actors are sticking to their position, other competing actors, regional and global, are emboldened to push their objectives forward and bridge the gap left by the international community. It is key to remember that the only global actor for whom Lebanon represents an immediate interest due to its geographical proximity and its involvement in some of the most pressing issues regarding its neighbourhood is the EU. In recent years, the EU has approached its cooperation with its southern neighbourhood through its immediate concerns, mainly security (countering terrorism) and migration resulting from economic distress or regional conflicts. While these dimensions represent legitimate concerns on the European side, excessively emphasising them has deprioritised the urgency of conducting political and governance reform, as in the case of Lebanon. Having its southern partners as “subcontractors” in the field of security and migration prevented the development of a more long-term vision of cooperation between the EU and its neighbours, including Lebanon.

Therefore, the EU’s action should go beyond the traditional humanitarian and economic support and adopt a bold, political tone. This is a formidable way for the Union to live up to its democratic aspirations and translate its values into concrete actions in places where these values have been relatively part of the sociopolitical fabric, where they are threatened and where a dominant portion of the population aspires for a more inclusive political system. Other regional and global actors will be able to test the EU’s willingness to stand for its values. The renewed US assertiveness around democracy promotion could encourage their European partners to reprioritise governance and blunt support to changemakers in its foreign policy agenda.

## **Conclusion**

As a result, Lebanon’s role as a middle ground between its Mediterranean and Arab or Middle Eastern heritages is part of identity, as

much as its tradition of openness at the cultural, social and political levels. While Lebanon's relations with its Arab partners should be maintained and reinforced in the long-term, its partnership with the EU will safeguard not only its integration in the Mediterranean space but also strengthen what has made it unique over time. In an era where the temptation of repression, authoritarian rule and monopolistic power ambitions are starting to emerge, there should be a surge of solidarity between the proponents of more representative, inclusive and open societies. The EU is in a privileged position to play this role in Lebanon and elsewhere but it needs to ground its approach in a long-term perspective, which orders a reordering of current priorities.

## La coopération UE-Méditerranée orientale dans le domaine des énergies renouvelables

LAURENT BAECHLER

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La protection de l'environnement offre les perspectives de coopération internationale parmi les plus fructueuses, étant donné que, dans ce domaine, les frontières nationales perdent toute pertinence pour définir les problèmes à aborder et les solutions à apporter, et que les acteurs impliqués ont systématiquement à gagner d'une coopération efficace. Parmi toutes les potentialités en la matière, celles concernant la gestion du risque climatique sont particulièrement intéressantes, dans la mesure où le changement climatique est probablement le risque environnemental majeur auquel la communauté internationale doit faire face, et qu'il impactera négativement pratiquement tous les autres risques environnementaux (biodiversité, accès à l'eau, etc.).

La région méditerranéenne est particulièrement concernée, car elle fait partie des zones les plus affectées par le réchauffement global. La région se réchauffe déjà plus rapidement que le reste de la planète, à hauteur de 20% actuellement. A l'avenir cet écart pourrait se creuser encore, avec dans certaines zones méditerranéennes un réchauffement de 3,8°C d'ici 2100 si aucunes mesures supplémentaires (par rapport à ce que l'on observe aujourd'hui) ne sont adoptées, soit un niveau de réchauffement bien supérieur à l'objectif adopté par l'Accord de Paris en 2015 (qui fixe à 2°C le réchauffement global maximum acceptable).

Par ailleurs les impacts du changement climatique s'annoncent plus intenses en Méditerranée qu'ailleurs : une baisse des précipitations

de 20% si l'objectif de l'Accord de Paris est atteint, et jusqu'à 40% dans le scénario actuel, ce qui augmenterait considérablement le stress hydrique dans la région ; le niveau de la mer elle-même augmente plus vite que celui des océans, de sorte qu'en 2050 on prévoit que la moitié des 20 villes les plus touchées par la montée du niveau des mers seront en Méditerranée ; des modèles récents indiquent que l'augmentation de la température des eaux de surface d'ici la fin du siècle sera particulièrement intense en Méditerranée, et encore davantage dans la partie orientale, avec des conséquences très négatives sur les écosystèmes marins ; les rendements des systèmes agricoles méditerranéens devraient chuter davantage que partout ailleurs dans le monde ; ...

Bien évidemment, les pays de la zone ne peuvent résoudre à eux seuls la question du réchauffement climatique. Réduire d'un certain pourcentage ses propres émissions de gaz à effet de serre (GES) n'a un impact proportionnel sur le réchauffement global que si tous les autres acteurs/pays font le même effort simultanément. Autrement dit il s'agit d'un problème collectif planétaire dont les solutions ne peuvent être que collectives et planétaires. En la matière, parler de coopération internationale pour lutter contre le réchauffement climatique peut vouloir dire plusieurs choses très différentes. Il peut être question d'abord de montrer l'exemple en adoptant une stratégie climatique très ambitieuse, quelle que soit l'attitude des autres pays : c'est ce que fait par exemple l'Union européenne depuis longtemps, en adoptant des cibles de réduction de ses émissions de GES très contraignantes, tout en incitant le reste du monde à s'engager également (en promettant d'intensifier son effort si les partenaires suivent la même voie). Il peut s'agir de s'engager mutuellement à faire des efforts de mitigation<sup>7</sup> du réchauffement global, comme l'ont fait

7 Il n'est question ici que de mitigation du changement climatique, autrement dit d'efforts pour atténuer le phénomène de réchauffement global. L'adaptation aux impacts du phénomène n'est pas abordée, pour la raison que les opportunités de coopération internationale en la matière sont très limitées.

les États-Unis et la Chine pour débloquer les négociations internationales qui ont débouché sur l'Accord de Paris en 2015. La coopération peut également reposer sur le partage de ressources technologiques ou financières pour atteindre les objectifs des stratégies climatiques, comme se sont engagés à le faire les pays riches par l'Accord de Paris, qui prévoit un transfert annuel de 100 milliards de dollars du Nord vers le Sud à partir de 2020 pour aider les pays en développement à intensifier leurs efforts de lutte contre le changement climatique et ses impacts.

Mais la coopération internationale en la matière a ses limites, car lutter contre le changement climatique repose ultimement sur les efforts réalisés par chaque pays pour contribuer à la stratégie planétaire de stabilisation du climat global. Les mesures reviennent pour l'essentiel à réduire les émissions de GES dans les secteurs les plus émetteurs, ce qui concerne à 85% l'utilisation d'énergie. Cela laisse apparemment peu de marge pour une coopération internationale. Il existe pourtant un domaine clé dans lequel les perspectives sont très prometteuses. Il s'agit de la production d'électricité à partir de sources énergétiques renouvelables. La Méditerranée orientale offre là d'énormes potentialités de coopération fructueuse.

A l'objectif de réchauffement global maximum fixé à 2°C par l'Accord de Paris est désormais associé celui de décarboner l'économie mondiale d'ici le milieu du XXI<sup>e</sup> siècle. C'est de fait le seul moyen de parvenir à un niveau de concentration de carbone dans l'atmosphère compatible avec l'objectif des 2°C. 126 pays ont déjà adopté officiellement cet objectif de décarbonation, ou considèrent le faire prochainement. En Méditerranée orientale seuls Chypre, le Liban et la Grèce ont repris l'objectif dans leur législation. La décarbonation de l'économie passe essentiellement par une augmentation de la contribution des renouvelables à la production d'électricité (jusqu'à 100% éventuellement), par l'électrification d'un maximum d'activités telles que les transports individuels, et par la compensation des émissions de carbone dans les secteurs non électrifiables, quand c'est possible

et rentable. Pour ce qui concerne la décarbonation du secteur de la production d'électricité par extension de la contribution des renouvelables, il est question de remplacer le charbon et le gaz, dominants à l'heure actuelle, par le solaire et l'éolien.

La Méditerranée orientale recèle en la matière des ressources importantes largement sous-exploitées. En Turquie le mix électrique repose encore à hauteur de 37% sur le charbon, l'énergie fossile la plus intense en carbone, alors que le solaire et l'éolien ne représentent que 9%. En Grèce le charbon assure encore 32% de la production d'électricité, contre 19% pour les renouvelables (la Grèce étant soumise aux objectifs ambitieux de l'Union européenne en la matière). Au Liban la production d'électricité repose presque intégralement sur le pétrole. En Egypte le gaz occupe 80% du total, contre seulement 1,5% pour les renouvelables. La Libye dépend intégralement du pétrole et du gaz. En Israël gaz et charbon assurent 95% de la production d'électricité. La Méditerranée orientale est donc dans son ensemble très loin des objectifs de décarbonation du secteur électrique, malgré des ressources renouvelables extrêmement abondantes, surtout dans le solaire, qui représente de 60 à 90% du potentiel renouvelable selon les pays (seule la Grèce possède un potentiel important dans l'éolien). Elle semble même s'en éloigner récemment, car la part de l'électricité à base d'énergies renouvelables dans le total de la production électrique est en baisse depuis 1990, de 12 à 8%.

Les obstacles principaux résident dans le coût de l'utilisation des énergies renouvelables, comparé à celui des énergies fossiles, dans le secteur électrique (en tenant compte du coût d'ensemble, incluant celui des infrastructures), dans le fait que l'usage des énergies fossiles est encore largement subventionné dans la zone, et finalement dans le fait que les réseaux électriques sont encore trop faiblement interconnectés pour permettre des échanges internationaux d'énergie entre les pays de la zone et leurs voisins, européens notamment. C'est principalement dans ce domaine que résident les potentialités de coopération les plus prometteuses.

De fait, l'électricité est une énergie qui ne se stocke pas, ou difficilement. Un réseau électrique doit donc équilibrer en permanence l'offre et la demande pour fonctionner dans de bonnes conditions. Un excès ou une pénurie d'un côté ou de l'autre met à l'arrêt le dispositif, avec parfois des conséquences humanitaires et économiques catastrophiques, comme on vient de le voir au Texas. Il existe deux moyens de contourner cette contrainte technique. D'une part le stockage d'électricité, qui permet le décalage temporel entre la production et la consommation ; il est encore à l'heure actuelle une solution trop coûteuse et compliquée techniquement pour pouvoir être utilisée à grande échelle. Il peut être question d'autre part d'étendre le réseau électrique internationalement, de manière à pouvoir importer ce que le réseau national ne peut procurer, ou exporter l'excès de production nationale à un moment donné. Par conséquent, un moyen très concret et efficace de coopérer en la matière consiste à interconnecter les marchés nationaux de l'électricité pour intensifier la contribution des renouvelables à la production d'électricité. Les réseaux électriques des pays méditerranéens forment un anneau presque complet (avec des interruptions entre Tunisie et Libye ainsi qu'entre Turquie et Syrie ; tandis qu'Israël est totalement coupé de cet anneau), mais le volume actuel des interconnexions est loin d'être suffisant pour autoriser le type de coopération à grande échelle qui pourrait générer des gains substantiels pour tous les pays partenaires.

Ces gains sont de plusieurs ordres, au-delà de la contribution à la réduction des émissions de carbone et à la mitigation du changement climatique. Développer un réseau électrique décarboné permet à un pays d'augmenter son indépendance et sa sécurité énergétique, en réduisant ses besoins d'importations énergétiques (qui sont en moyenne de l'ordre de 40% de leur consommation pour les pays de la zone). Développer les énergies renouvelables est porteur d'emplois, car les technologies associées sont beaucoup plus intensives en facteur travail que l'exploitation des énergies fossiles. C'est un atout majeur pour des pays touchés par un niveau de chômage élevé,

souvent supérieur à 10% de la population active. Pouvoir exporter un surplus de production électrique à base d'énergies renouvelables est une nouvelle source de revenus d'exportation pour les pays concernés. Un élément souvent oublié de ce bilan est le fait que remplacer la production d'électricité à base d'énergies fossiles par une production à base de sources d'énergie renouvelables, comme le solaire et l'éolien, permet de réduire le stress hydrique, dans la mesure où ces dernières technologies n'exigent pas d'utilisation d'eau pour le refroidissement des unités de production, comme c'est le cas pour les centrales à base de charbon ou de gaz. La Libye, Israël et le Liban sont des pays qui pourraient particulièrement tirer parti de ce potentiel.

L'Union européenne peut jouer un rôle décisif dans le développement de ce potentiel énergétique. Le Plan solaire méditerranéen, lancé dans le cadre de l'Union pour la Méditerranée en 2008, a été une étape décisive dans cette voie. Il s'agit de renforcer cette coopération, doublement gagnante, car elle aiderait l'UE à atteindre ses objectifs climatiques ambitieux, tout en aidant les pays de la Méditerranée orientale à satisfaire leurs besoins énergétiques croissants (on y anticipe un doublement de la demande d'électricité d'ici 2030). Depuis 2015 la diplomatie énergétique de l'UE est conçue comme un complément au projet d'union énergétique européenne. Les instruments institutionnels pour la promouvoir ne manquent pas : Fonds européen pour les investissements stratégiques, Banque européenne d'investissement, Banque européenne pour la reconstruction et le développement, Mécanisme pour l'interconnexion en Europe, Projets Interreg. Ils participent tous d'une même stratégie de coopération qui, dans le domaine énergétique, recèle des potentialités énormes qu'il serait très dommageable de ne pas exploiter dans les années avenir, tant pour les pays de l'UE que pour leurs partenaires méditerranéens.

# **We First Need Trust: Turkey's EU Adventure of 58 Years**

**ALI CINAR**

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Relations between the European Union and Turkey garnered the attention of recent European Councils. The EU leaders' summit of March 2021, in particular, was convened virtually and aimed at improving bilateral relations and determining areas of disagreement and cooperation. The statement published after the summit indicates that the highlights within the scope of the discussions between the EU and Turkey were the Eastern Mediterranean, the issue of refugees and updating the Customs Union. The statement claims that the EU was ready to hold discussions with Turkey regarding public health, climate, counterterrorism and regional issues. The statement also reports that the European Commission would urge increased collaboration with Turkey regarding visa liberalisation and that those topics that could not be concluded at the summit would be revisited at a later stage.

The statement's mention of the EU's positive reaction to the recent exploratory talks between Turkey and Greece and steps to reduce tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean is also good news. Josep Borrell, High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, mentioned that there would be steps to organise a multilateral conference on the Eastern Mediterranean, that the developments would be closely observed, and that a coordinated approach would be adopted from all sides. During the summit, the possibility of Greece and GASC applying pressure to impose sanctions against

Turkey was very high. However, it was evident that the EU was not keen on imposing sanctions. Diplomacy should always be the first priority over imposing sanctions. Imposing sanctions on Turkey would push Turkey more toward Russia and China. Who would benefit from imposing sanctions on Turkey then? Thus, the policies that Turkey has recently implemented in terms of the Eastern Mediterranean have resulted in less tension and the avoidance of disagreements not only between Turkey and the EU but also within the EU itself. Affirmative statements were also made regarding the fact that it is important for the EU to act in partnership with Turkey on the matter of the refugees. It is said in the statement that the fact that Turkey is hosting Syrian refugees and is taking measures to prevent these refugees from crossing to Europe is very important to the EU. It was also emphasised at the summit that cooperation between the two parties needed to be strengthened on the matter of migration management. Within this framework, emphasis was made on strengthening cooperation in the fight against illegal immigration and on the matter of returning uncontrolled immigrants and the immigrants whose asylum is denied to Turkey. The fact that these statements related to refugees, which have been used for a long time but have not gone beyond political rhetoric and have yet to be transformed into a tangible policy, shows that these statements are also a delaying tactic. When we look at the statements made by the EU on the matter of the refugees, it can be seen that Turkey is a partner the EU cannot abandon. Moreover, besides the issues brought about by COVID-19, EU member states also fear facing additional problems that may be caused by a possible refugee influx from Turkey.

Another issue touched on during the summit is the update on the Customs Union, which has been sidestepped by the EU for many years. It was reported at the summit that the EU is open to taking critical steps regarding this issue. It was emphasised that the economic relations between the EU and Turkey need to be improved and that the European Council should begin working on the revision

of the Customs Unions, which was an issue that couldn't pass beyond the rhetoric in order to deepen these relations.

The fact that the discussion of issues regarding the EU and Turkey's relations has been temporarily postponed shows that there is no consensus within the EU in regard to Turkey (as for most issues), that the EU has been trying to buy time by postponing the establishment of concrete policies in its relations with Turkey for a while, and that it can replay the role of "bad cop" at any moment. EU member states have been not only in a political crisis under the influence of the far right but also unable to establish a common foreign policy regarding most issues. It is clear that one of the crises in regard to establishing a common foreign policy is the relationship with Turkey.

Considering the upcoming general elections in France and Germany, it is possible to say that both countries are struggling with the far right's domestic policies; and with the possible influx of refugees into European countries, the far right's ideology will secure more of a footing in society and politics. Therefore, EU member states, particularly France and Germany, must take concrete steps—beyond political rhetoric—for conflict zones and strengthen their collaboration in relations with Turkey to maintain their political stability and protect the EU's unity. For bilateral relations to progress rationally and equally, the EU has to keep its word and take tangible steps. For Turkey to become a full member of the EU, member states need to end their marginalisation of Turkey, and the threat-perception discourse directed towards it, to win votes from far-right voters based on their domestic policies (as did the French President Emmanuel Macron in his latest statements) and move relations toward a rational and equal basis and away from the value-based foreign policy understanding. Otherwise, political, economic and social relations that are strategically important for both Turkey and the EU are doomed to move towards a dead end.

## The US and Europe to Keep Turkey in the Alliance!

As we move towards a transatlantic relationship that has been re-defined after the Biden administration took office, Turkey somehow manages to be a subject on the agenda of every important meeting. President Joe Biden's address to the European leaders at the Euro summit from Washington, D.C., through a video conference on 25 March 2021 was such an occasion. After President Trump's challenging, confrontational attitude towards Europe, a US President who attends the summit and sends them messages of cooperation and solidarity signifies, without a doubt, a very refreshing and completely different reality for Europe. According to the White House statement, Biden reiterated his commitment to revitalising the relations between the US and the EU in his speech. He stressed the "common democratic values" by stating that a strong EU is favourable to the US. He listed fighting COVID-19 and climate change, deepening economic ties and the goal of "setting the rules by democracies, not autocracies" among the common challenges when urging the EU for close collaboration. The US President then expressed his desire to work closely with the EU in the areas of common interests in foreign policy. Within this context, he put the People's Republic of China and Russia at the top. Then President Biden stressed that the US and the EU need to work closely and in continuity on Turkey, South Caucasus, Eastern Europe and the Western Balkans. Turkey came in third on Biden's list of foreign policy topics, after China and Russia. There was a strong consensus on maintaining close coordination between the US and the EU in foreign policy, security and the economy, as well as responding to global challenges such as COVID-19 and climate change. Democratic values and the upholding of fundamental freedoms were also included in these global challenges.

Here's what was said in the paragraph about Turkey: "We can say that in the new era, there will be close cooperation and consultation mechanisms between the US and the EU regarding Turkey. In regard to relations with Turkey, the issues of the Eastern Mediterranean,

the supremacy of law and fundamental rights were the highlights. As a matter of fact, the title of law/fundamental rights is placed at the centre of the relations. However, it is inevitable that the agenda of improving relations with Turkey will extend from Russia to the Caucasus and from there to Libya and many other crisis areas that concern the collaboration between the US and the EU.

In fact, the EU already paved the way to this cooperation at the summit of December 2020, announcing that it would now consult with the United States on issues concerning Turkey and the situation in the Eastern Mediterranean.”

There is an issue here that we should underline. The resolutions of the previous EU summits in October and December 2020 did not address the human rights and legal matters related to Turkey in any way and focused mainly on issues in the Eastern Mediterranean. However, at the March 2021 summit this attitude was abandoned, and even though the Eastern Mediterranean was once again prominent in the published statement, this time, as was the case in the Blinken-Borrell agreement, “the rule of law and fundamental rights” was emphasised and concerns about these matters were also addressed. Likewise, the statement noted that dialogue on these issues is “an integral part of the EU-Turkey relations” and emphasised “women’s rights” and the “targeting of the political parties”.

We can assume that a number of factors have played a significant role in the change to the EU’s attitude. One of these factors is the reactions in Europe sparked off by what has happened in Turkey over the past few weeks. We should also take into account the impact of criticism directed towards various institutions, from the European Parliament to the EU’s decision-making bodies, accusing them of “remaining silent” in regard to the developments in Turkey. We need to be prepared about the coordination between the US and the EU that is likely to become more frequent in the upcoming years. The

outcomes of this are already becoming apparent. Turkey must take this direction into consideration in its policy with the Western world.

The European Union membership process of Turkey is a process that started with the signing of the partnership agreement with the European Economic Community in 1963 and got accelerated by applying for full membership in 1987. Accepted as a candidate country by the EU member states in 1999, Turkey began the negotiations for full membership in 2005. There have been occasional tensions and certain bargains have been struck; however, Turkey's accession to the EU has never been finalised. While many Eastern European countries including some problematic ones became EU members, Turkey could not get what it wanted due to many issues. In fact, I see that Turkey and the EU have a relationship that cannot be broken, but the trust issue has increased even more. Neither the EU nor Turkey can sever ties with each other.

In particular, the conflicts in the Eastern Mediterranean and the EU's uneasiness concerning human rights in Turkey are increasing every day. Similarly, Turkey has also started to question the EU's sincerity. There may be a large number of people saying "That's enough. We should withdraw the membership application" if the question of whether Turkey should give up on the EU membership is raised in the Turkish public. However, the dialogue between both Turkish and EU officials is very important. This dialogue should not be severed at all. In other words, the EU pushing Turkey toward Russia and China will be even more detrimental to the EU. The first thing that needs to be done is to re-institute trust between the EU and Turkey. If we take into account that the US will also act together with the EU in this, it is inevitable that relations between Turkey and the US will improve. Yes, there are problems in Turkey, but sincere support from allies will be important for the resolution of these problems. My biggest piece of advice is for trust and dialogue to be built as soon as possible.

## La coopération euro-méditerranéenne dans le domaine de l'eau

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La région de Méditerranée orientale cumule plusieurs caractéristiques faisant de l'accès à l'eau un défi permanent pour ses populations. C'est tout d'abord l'une des régions naturellement les plus arides au monde. Le pourtour Sud et Est du bassin méditerranéen (hormis la Turquie) est caractérisé par une rareté physique de l'eau, autrement dit une présence des précipitations suffisamment faible pour rendre l'accès à l'eau difficile, même en présence d'infrastructures et institutions adéquates pour gérer la ressource. Ensuite la demande pour les ressources en eau est en forte augmentation depuis quelques décennies, en raison de l'impact de la croissance démographique et du développement économique dans la région, d'autant plus que ce développement repose sur une part encore élevée du secteur agricole dans les activités économiques, le secteur de loin le plus gourmand en eau avec 65% des prélèvements en eau dans la région (la demande en eau pour l'irrigation y est le double de la moyenne méditerranéenne). Cette tendance est appelée à se poursuivre, du fait notamment que la région est l'une des dernières dans le monde où la démographie est encore dynamique. Associée à cette tendance, l'urbanisation accélérée dans la région devrait faire augmenter la demande en eau dans des proportions importantes. Enfin, l'offre en ressources en eau subit les impacts du changement climatique, qui a déjà contribué à faire diminuer les précipitations de 20% dans cette partie du monde, et devrait faire baisser substantiellement l'accès à l'eau dans les décennies à venir.

Le résultat combiné de ces tendances mène à un niveau déjà élevé de stress hydrique en Méditerranée orientale. Le rapport entre les prélèvements en eau et les ressources en eau renouvelables (qui définit le stress hydrique) est supérieur à 100% dans presque tous les pays de la région, et atteint même près de 850% en Libye. En conséquence, ces pays doivent exploiter leurs ressources en eau non renouvelables pour combler cet écart entre ressources et besoins, autrement dit des ressources aquifères fossiles qui, par définition, s'épuisent à mesure qu'elles sont exploitées.

Cette situation est non seulement insoutenable sur le plan de la gestion des ressources en eau, mais également potentiellement source d'instabilité géopolitique dans la région. De fait, les difficultés croissantes d'accès à l'eau entretiennent des tensions entre pays riverains le long des bassins fluviaux principaux, surtout lorsque ces pays dépendent de ressources en eau extérieures pour satisfaire leurs besoins, comme c'est le cas à 97% pour l'Égypte avec les ressources du Nil, pour Israël à 55% dans le bassin du Jourdain, ou pour la Syrie à 43% en aval de l'Euphrate. Les nombreux projets de barrages turcs le long du Tigre et de l'Euphrate alimentent des relations conflictuelles avec ses voisins syriens et irakiens. Le bassin du Jourdain est depuis des décennies une source de tensions importantes entre Israël et ses voisins arabes. Le bassin du Nil est le lieu de relations de plus en plus conflictuelles entre l'Égypte, l'acteur dominant depuis des millénaires en aval du fleuve, et les pays en amont dont le développement économique exige un partage plus équitable des ressources en eau. À Chypre le Sud grec monopolise géographiquement les ressources en eau, tandis que le Nord s'en remet à la Turquie pour ses approvisionnements.

A ces relations ouvertement conflictuelles en rapport avec des eaux de surface sont en train de s'ajouter des tensions larvées sur l'accès aux ressources en eau souterraines, qui sont également très souvent communes à plusieurs pays. Celles-ci sont surexploitées du fait du stress hydrique – déjà mentionné – très élevé dans la région. A la

différence des eaux de surface, ces ressources en eaux souterraines sont non renouvelables et partiellement « invisibles », au sens où il est très difficile d'en faire une estimation exacte. Elles sont victimes du syndrome dit de la « tragédie des communs », duquel s'engage une course à la surexploitation des ressources, le premier arrivé étant le premier servi. Les aquifères communs en surexploitation sont nombreux : ceux reliés au bassin fluvial du Jourdain sont essentiels pour Israël et ses voisins ; les nappes aquifères du bassin de Nubie sont exploitées par le projet libyen de Grande rivière artificielle, ainsi que le projet égyptien de développement de la Vallée du Sud ; etc. Même si les « guerres de l'eau » annoncées depuis des décennies n'ont toujours pas eu lieu où que ce soit dans le monde, il est certain que les tensions sur l'accès à l'eau entre pays riverains de bassins fluviaux ou aquifères transfrontaliers ne feront qu'aggraver des situations géopolitiques conflictuelles en Méditerranée orientale.

Quel type de coopération peut-on envisager pour gérer ces situations conflictuelles ? Un premier constat incontournable est que l'eau, contrairement à pratiquement toutes les autres ressources naturelles, se transporte très mal internationalement. Les conditions de transport (le coût principalement) sont telles qu'il n'est économiquement pas viable de transférer de grandes quantités d'eau sur de longues distances. Les grands projets d'infrastructures en la matière sont de fait soit intra-nationaux, soit associés à un contexte géopolitique très particulier dans lequel les considérations économiques sont mises de côté, comme dans le cas du pipeline sous-marin qui relie la Turquie à la partie Nord de Chypre. Il n'est donc pas envisageable de gérer la pénurie d'eau en Méditerranée orientale par le transfert massif de ressources en eau depuis l'Europe, qui bénéficie de précipitations abondantes et où peu de pays sont en situation de stress hydrique élevé.

La seule façon d'envisager un transfert international de ressources en eau est par le biais de l'eau incorporée dans les biens échangés internationalement, ce que l'on appelle l'eau virtuelle, surtout présente

dans les produits agricoles. De fait, les données disponibles sur les échanges internationaux d'eau virtuelle indiquent que globalement les pays riches en eau exportent de l'eau contenue dans les biens agricoles et industriels vers les pays pauvres en eau. Mais, de ce point de vue, la région méditerranéenne présente une « anomalie », dans la mesure où, depuis plusieurs décennies, les pays du Nord du bassin méditerranéen importent beaucoup plus d'eau virtuelle que les pays du Sud ou de l'Est, alors qu'ils sont globalement beaucoup mieux dotés en ressources en eau. Il n'est pas certain (loin de là) que les décennies à venir corrigeront cet état de fait, qui repose essentiellement sur le modèle de développement du Sud/Est méditerranéen, encore largement fondé sur le secteur agricole (alors que le Nord importe davantage de biens agricoles). De toute façon, les échanges d'eau virtuelle sont jusqu'ici « spontanés », guidés par les marchés mondiaux, et ne font absolument pas l'objet de stratégies nationales destinées à corriger des pénuries locales ou nationales en eau. Une coopération euro-méditerranéenne fondée sur ce genre de stratégie n'est donc pas pour demain. Par ailleurs les potentialités d'une telle stratégie ne couvriraient pas tous les problèmes liés à l'accès à l'eau dans la région, notamment dans leur dimension géopolitique.

De manière plus réaliste, on doit envisager cette coopération dans le secteur de l'eau autour de trois axes fondamentaux destinés à couvrir l'ensemble des défis qui se posent dans la région : le défi du manque physique d'eau accentué par les pressions croissantes exercées sur les ressources disponibles ; celui de la faiblesse des moyens financiers, techniques et institutionnels pour gérer la situation dans les pays de la Méditerranée orientale ; et celui de la conflictualité régionale autour de l'accès aux ressources en eau. Dans ces trois dimensions, une coopération entre l'Union européenne et les pays de la Méditerranée orientale est non seulement possible, mais également souhaitable.

Un premier axe de coopération concerne l'évaluation et le financement des projets destinés à améliorer l'accès à l'eau qui peuvent être de

deux ordres : améliorer l'accès à l'eau par une augmentation de l'offre, ou par une meilleure gestion de la demande. Dans le premier cas, il s'agirait de faire en sorte que les projets de nouvelles infrastructures ou d'entretien d'infrastructures existantes soient compatibles avec un meilleur partage de la ressource à l'échelon régional, pour éviter que de nouvelles pressions sur les ressources en eau aggravent une situation déjà difficile. Cela peut concerner des projets d'irrigation, de stations de dessalement d'eau, de barrages, ... Mais il est à peu près inévitable que l'avenir de la gestion de l'eau dans la région repose avant tout sur des projets de gestion de la demande, du fait de la rareté physique de la ressource qui la caractérise. En la matière il est essentiel que les efforts de restriction de l'accès à la ressource, puisque c'est de cela qu'il s'agit en l'occurrence (que ce soit par le biais d'une tarification accrue de l'eau ou de tout autre dispositif de rationnement), soient conçus de manière équitable entre les différentes catégories d'utilisateurs concernés. Un regard extérieur impartial, doublé d'une expertise dans le domaine, peut aider à faire en sorte que ces projets contribuent à améliorer la gestion de l'eau en méditerranée orientale. Au-delà des capacités de financement de ces projets, l'UE présente les caractéristiques d'un partenaire prometteur.

Un deuxième axe porte sur le partage d'expérience et le transfert de compétences en matière de gestion intégrée des ressources en eau. Même si les conditions de gestion des ressources en eau sont différentes entre le Nord et l'Est ou le Sud de la Méditerranée, les pays méditerranéens de l'UE bénéficient d'une longue expérience en matière de gestion de l'eau, dont ils peuvent faire profiter leurs voisins. Il est ici question de réforme des institutions engagées dans les politiques de l'eau, de formation des acteurs impliqués, ou encore de sensibilisation de l'opinion publique aux questions d'accès à l'eau, afin de réorienter le secteur vers des pratiques plus durables.

Un troisième axe doit s'intéresser spécifiquement aux tensions sur l'accès à l'eau en Méditerranée orientale, de manière à faciliter la

médiation et une forme d'« hydro-diplomatie » à même de transformer des sources de conflit en opportunités de coopération régionale. Dans ce domaine également, l'UE bénéficie d'une expérience unique en ce qui concerne la gestion des situations conflictuelles le long de bassins fluviaux transfrontaliers.

Ces pistes de coopération ne sont bien évidemment pas nouvelles, et ont été dans une certaine mesure exploitées sous diverses formes, la principale étant l'Union pour la Méditerranée et ses multiples instruments. Mais la question de l'eau en Méditerranée est suffisamment importante pour justifier la création d'une agence dédiée, dont le rôle de catalyseur pourrait aller bien au-delà de ce qui a déjà été proposé dans ce domaine. Une agence euro-méditerranéenne de l'eau serait non seulement un symbole, mais également une concrétisation de la volonté de faire de la coopération dans le domaine de l'eau un axe majeur du développement dans la région.

# Multilateralism in the Eastern Mediterranean: The Only Way Out of the Deadlock

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The conflicts in Libya and in Syria, the clashes over natural gas resources among littoral countries, the maritime disputes in the Levantine Sea<sup>8</sup>, the unsolved Cyprus problem, as well as the multiple socio-economic fractures existing in each country of the region are intertwined drivers of tensions that are redefining power equilibria and geostrategic opportunities in the wider Mediterranean.

In fact, in this complex and ever-changing Great Sea, some littoral countries (such as Egypt, Turkey and Israel) are promoting pro-active foreign policy in order to satisfy national economic interests and geopolitical ambitions and expanding their respective regional status. A competition fostered in particular by disagreement over territorial waters and natural gas discoveries in the Egyptian offshore (Zohr and Nour), as well as in Cyprus (Aphrodite and Calypso) and Israel (Leviathan, Tamar, Dalit and Karish). Although these factors are crucial in terms of national domestic economies and sub-regional energy cooperation, the disputes have instead shown a very

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8 Most countries in the region have neither signed the Convention nor the Agreement of the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), delineating their maritime borders and ensuring that a state party that can exercise maritime sovereignty in an area of up to 12 nautical miles from its coast and to establish an exclusive economic zone (EEZ), where it could claim rights over fishing, mining and drilling activities, in an additional area of 200 miles. Neither Turkey nor Israel have signed the UNCLOS chart yet. Some of the current disputes and tensions in the Mediterranean have been solved through bilateral maritime border agreements, including Turkey and Libya's Government of National Accord (GNA) or between Greece and Egypt. For more details on this question, see the UNCLOS convention, [www.un.org/depts/los/convention\\_agreements/texts/unclos/unclos\\_e.pdf](http://www.un.org/depts/los/convention_agreements/texts/unclos/unclos_e.pdf).

high disruptive potential able to impede any attempt at peaceful cooperation and regionalisation, instead fomenting conflicts and deep tensions. Although the genesis of these disputes are far back in the past (at least since the peace treaty negotiated during the Lausanne Conference in 1922-1923), the current condition of extreme fluidity and uncertainty is fuelled by the reprise of chauvinist policies of littoral countries which tend to securitise most of the issues and controversies in the region<sup>9</sup>.

In this regard, the interconnected dynamics regarding: 1) energy discoveries; 2) geopolitical antagonisms and new balances of power; 3) security imperatives; and 4) increased interest in the area from external powers, have spawned a new geopolitical context related to the same conflictual path that could have tremendous impact for the Mediterranean Basin as a whole, as well as for the stability of maritime transportation and energy markets worldwide. But widespread and enduring instability has a fundamental impact on patterns of alliances and on the idea of a comprehensive regional architecture in the new evolving region. It's crystal clear that in this route the Mediterranean is a "geopolitical paradox" amid challenges and threats that could undermine trans-regional scenarios and a parallel level of great opportunities for regional stability and wealth<sup>10</sup>.

As part of this balancing act of the regional system, the gas factor could be a variable to spread cooperation among littoral countries, but this chance instead has exacerbated tensions, leaving Egypt, Israel and Turkey at opposite extremes<sup>11</sup>. For their part, Egypt and

9 Evaghorou, Evaghoras L., "Turbulent Times in the Eastern Mediterranean: The Struggle for Power", *Mediterranean Quarterly*, vol. 29, no. 1, 2018, p. 1-18.

10 Zenonas Tziarras, "The New Geopolitics of the Eastern Mediterranean – An Introduction", in Z. Tziarras (ed.), *The New Geopolitics of the Eastern Mediterranean: Trilateral Partnerships and Regional Security*, Report 3, Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) & Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES), Oslo-Nicosia, 2019, pp. 1-10.

11 Jana Puglierin et al., *Views from the capitals: Gas conflict in the eastern Mediterranean*, Commentary, European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR), 16 September 2020, [ecfr.eu/article/vfc\\_views\\_from\\_the\\_capitals\\_gas\\_conflict\\_in\\_the\\_eastern\\_mediterranean](https://ecfr.eu/article/vfc_views_from_the_capitals_gas_conflict_in_the_eastern_mediterranean).

Israel are working with other regional players (like France) to enlarge and shape the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF) – an international organisation formed by the main littoral countries from which Turkey is excluded<sup>12</sup> – into a new multilateral framework of cooperation with the European Union and other external observers (like the United States and the United Arab Emirates). Despite this imperfect proposal and a dangerous nationalist rhetoric based on exclusion – due to the Turkish perception as a threat – the only viable path remains through dialogue and compromise among local players. In fact, a true and inclusive multilateral process could encourage a holistic approach in which to arrange a regional pattern of economic cooperation, informal dialogue and political interdependence useful to overcoming the existing fault-lines<sup>13</sup>. The only way out of this deadlock is to get all regional countries to talk. In fact, some in the EU consider it unwise not to consider Turkey's concerns in Eastern Mediterranean dynamics.

It is evident that a mediation promoted by the EU (in which Germany and/or Italy play a central role) could be a good chance to defuse this time bomb, because it's impossible to distinguish single issues (like the Libyan crisis or maritime disputes) without a comprehensive vision that excludes Turkey in a broader regional system. These issues are now interwoven and this applies to Turkey as well as to Egypt, Greece or Israel. In fact, this is all the more important considering the fact that Europe and Turkey need one another on a wide range of issues, from migration to security. In this way, it might be an option for strong cooperation between the EMGF and the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), in order to become a driver for peace, keeping together same interests and ambitions of its

12 EMGF is international organisation formed by Cyprus, Egypt, France, Greece, Israel, Italy, Jordan and Palestine. It was established as an international body on 16 January 2020. The headquarters are in Cairo, Egypt.

13 George Tzogopoulos, *How the EU should deal with the eastern Mediterranean*, Commentary, European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR), 25 September 2020, [ecfr.eu/article/commentary\\_how\\_the\\_eu\\_should\\_deal\\_with\\_the\\_eastern\\_mediterranean](https://ecfr.eu/article/commentary_how_the_eu_should_deal_with_the_eastern_mediterranean).

member states<sup>14</sup>. Similarly, regional integration in gas infrastructure and energy market can and will help to defuse rampant tensions and favour a more strictly cooperation among littoral countries. Although the regional hydrocarbon resources are small by global standards<sup>15</sup>, these are potentially highly significant to impact positively in the littoral countries. Thanks to energy revenues and a regional energy integrated market, littoral countries can realise potential benefits and promote several domestic reforms. A pragmatic and naïve approach aimed to propose a realistic solution<sup>16</sup>.

In this perspective, a first concrete operational horizon of change could come from an EU mediation in the tensions between Greece and Turkey in the Aegean Sea and in the relaunch of the dialogue between Ankara and Egypt to neutralise the conflictual competition in Libya and in the Levantine Basin. A *detente* in these scenarios could also persuade other actors to consider informal dialogue as a useful model for resolving other escalations in the Eastern Mediterranean (such as, for example, the tensions between Turkey and Greece over Cyprus). From that point of view, it could be primarily important to dismantle the power struggle between Turkey and Egypt to neutralise some of the rising competitions in the Mediterranean. In fact, the Libyan conflict and the Eastern Mediterranean disputes are deeply connected and without a result in these two different questions it is impossible to promote a regional de-escalation culminating in a diplomatic solution. This point represents the great dilemma in Eastern Mediterranean dynamics, that are further

14 Asli Aydintaşbaş, *Best to sit and talk: How to solve the conflict in the eastern Mediterranean*, Commentary, European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR), 24 September 2020, [ecfr.eu/article/commentary\\_best\\_to\\_sit\\_and\\_talk\\_how\\_to\\_solve\\_the\\_conflict\\_in\\_the\\_eastern\\_me](https://ecfr.eu/article/commentary_best_to_sit_and_talk_how_to_solve_the_conflict_in_the_eastern_me).

15 The gas and oil reserves in the Mediterranean represent almost 1 percent of the global energy reserves. For more details, see: [www.worldometers.info/gas/gas-reserves-by-country](https://www.worldometers.info/gas/gas-reserves-by-country).

16 Nimrod Goren (ed.) et al., *The Eastern Mediterranean: New Dynamics and Potential for Cooperation*, EuroMeSCo Joint Policy Study, European Institute of the Mediterranean (IEMed), 9 March 2018, [www.euromesco.net/publication/the-eastern-mediterranean-new-dynamics-and-potential-for-cooperation](https://www.euromesco.net/publication/the-eastern-mediterranean-new-dynamics-and-potential-for-cooperation).

complicated by Middle Eastern factors, such as the Arab quartet's boycott of Qatar since mid-2017. Qatar is a strong ally of Turkey in the Middle East, with which it shares some points on the regional agenda, like Islamism. In this scenario, Egypt shares a deep mistrust of Turkey's strategy, which it sees itself opposing in Libya. However, the Libyan crisis could become a turning point in de-escalating tensions in the Mediterranean, because the latest developments in the Libya diplomatic dialogue could bring the North-African country to experience a real process of post-war transition, as never before in the recent past. Moreover, a success in these talks might persuade competing powers to consider the Libyan platform a model also to be replicated in Eastern Mediterranean dynamics to resolve this escalation<sup>17</sup>.

The confrontation in the Mediterranean risks becoming a new geopolitical factor of competition among regional and international powers, in which reflections of Middle Eastern dynamics clearly emerge. A more aggressive geostrategic rivalry could indeed exacerbate national and regional tensions and trigger other conflicts. A conflicting attitude that may turn the Mediterranean into a new battleground in the geopolitically unbalanced wider Middle East. In this sense, despite the European attempts at a detente aimed to de-emphasise competition and promote cooperation in this area, these latest developments may reflect a pragmatic approach to contain dangerous escalations in the power competition in the Mediterranean. In conclusion, one concept must be clear: no one can win a war in the Mediterranean, but diplomacy is still the only rational way to solve the disputes and to reach a regional solution. Multilateralism is the best option to manage crisis in the region and the best hope to mitigate tensions and "normalise regional instability"

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17 Matteo Colombo, *Mutual reassurance: Why Europe should support talks between Egypt and Turkey*, Commentary, European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR), 14 January 2021, [ecfr.eu/article/mutual-reassurance-why-europe-should-support-talks-between-egypt-and-turkey](https://ecfr.eu/article/mutual-reassurance-why-europe-should-support-talks-between-egypt-and-turkey).

in order to promote a truly positive agenda of cooperation for the Mediterranean<sup>18</sup>.

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18 Galip Dalay, *Turkey, Europe, and the Eastern Mediterranean: Charting a way out of the current deadlock*, Policy Briefing, Brookings Doha Centre, 28 January 2021, [www.brookings.edu/research/turkey-europe-and-the-eastern-mediterranean-charting-a-way-out-of-the-current-deadlock](http://www.brookings.edu/research/turkey-europe-and-the-eastern-mediterranean-charting-a-way-out-of-the-current-deadlock).

# Energy Poverty in the Eastern Mediterranean Dialogue

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Energy poverty has different definitions and measures in the EU Member States. They refer to an inadequate level of energy services in the home due to inadequate financial resources, bad housing situations or high energy prices. Although this topic is closely related to the national socio-economic, energy and infrastructural history, and despite the subsidiarity principle, initiatives have been taken at the EU level to promote and incentivise Member States to develop energy market regulations in order to protect vulnerable households. The move of the EU towards recognising energy poverty as an issue to put on the EU agenda dates to the directive on the liberalisation of the energy market and has accelerated since 2009. Driven by the UN SDGs and notably the SDG7 aiming to “Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all<sup>19</sup>”, the EU has increasingly aligned its action towards tackling energy poverty within “a just energy transition”. Of course, energy poverty in Eastern Mediterranean countries has different realities but it also combines issues of energy accessibility, affordability, efficiency and reliability for which the EU experience can be inspiring and help foster dialogue with and within Eastern Mediterranean countries.

The first section of the note explores how energy poverty was put on the agenda of the EU. The second one gives examples of dialogue methods implemented in the EU. Based on the European experience

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19 UN website – Department of Economic and Social Affairs – Sustainable Development, [sdgs.un.org/goals/goal7](https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal7).

in this field, the third section proposes a dialogue agenda for Eastern Mediterranean countries to address the issue of energy poverty.

## **1. Energy Poverty on the EU Agenda**

### ***An Unequal Access to Energy***

Historically, electrification programmes developed at the national level were the main strategic tools to develop adequate infrastructure to ensure electrical access for all. Thanks to huge investments in the electricity grid, the physical access of electricity of European households is no longer an issue, however, with some exceptions such as people living in some remote rural areas, like in Romania, on the islands, some minorities like the Roma population or people living in informal settlements. Gas grid access or access to district heating does not cover all territories. Some alternative sources are still quite widespread like wood or gas bottle or propane gas. But most of the time, alternative solutions are often more expensive and sometimes more polluting than grid-based fuels. This raises the question of equal treatment among consumers in terms of energy accessibility. In the new Clean Energy Package legislation of 2018, consumers are increasingly encouraged to invest in clean energy through energy communities although most vulnerable consumers may be left behind due to lack of investment capacity.

### ***The Definition and Protection of Vulnerable and Energy-Poor Consumers***

However, building infrastructure is not enough if households can be disconnected from the grid and deprived of access if they can't afford electricity or if they restrain themselves from consuming and live in an uncomfortable space because they are unable to pay. Such diversified

situations may affect up to 82 million European households<sup>20</sup>. In the directive 2003/54/EC concerning “common rules for the internal market in electricity”, the EU required all Member States to define and protect the rights of “vulnerable consumers” in the context of the internal electricity market. The third energy package in 2009 reinforces this requirement to ensure the protection of vulnerable consumers (directive 2009/72/EC).

All Member States came up with different definitions and actions (INSIGHT\_E 2015). Very few defined energy poverty but at least some efforts were made towards the recognition of an energy affordability and accessibility issue and towards the increased protective regulations of energy consumers. Most countries also implemented social schemes to help vulnerable consumers to pay their bills – electricity or gas social bonuses were for example introduced in Spain. The EU placed the consumer at the core of the “clean energy package for all Europeans” and required the Member States to introduce adequate regulations allowing consumers to easily switch suppliers and benefit from a more competitive energy market and become prosumers within the framework of the energy transition. The recast electricity directive of 2019 (Directive (EU) 2019/944) explicitly requires Member States to assess the number of households exposed to energy poverty and “to take appropriate measures to address energy poverty where it is identified”.

### ***The Energy Efficiency Dimension of Energy Poverty***

In addition to introducing protections and support measures, another way to alleviate energy poverty, increase energy affordability and reduce energy bills is to improve the quality of housing thus reducing

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 20 Stefan Bouzarovski and Harriet Thomson, with contributions by Marine Cornelis, Anaïs Varo and Rachel Guyet, *Towards an Inclusive Energy Transition in the European Union: Confronting Energy Poverty amidst a Global Crisis – Third Pan-EU energy poverty Report of the EU Energy Poverty Observatory*, [op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/4a440cfo-b5f5-11ea-bb7a-01aa75ed71a1/language-en](http://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/4a440cfo-b5f5-11ea-bb7a-01aa75ed71a1/language-en), June 2020.

the energy consumption needed. Therefore, the EU introduced energy poverty mitigation through energy efficiency in two directives in 2010 (Directive 2010/31/EU on Energy Performance of Buildings) and 2012 (Directive 2012/27/EU on Energy Efficiency). The recommendation of the European commission on transposing the energy savings obligations under the Energy Efficiency Directive (2019/1658) also encourages the Member States to set energy poverty alleviation as a priority that should also be translated into the National Energy and Climate Plans.

Energy poverty issues are gradually gaining traction at the EU level. With the recent EU Green Deal and the Renovation Wave (2020)<sup>21</sup>, the EU Commission recommends upgrading the European building stock in order to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, create jobs and help occupants to live in more affordable and comfortable homes.

## **2. How does the EU Promote Dialogue among the Member States on Energy Poverty?**

### ***EU Directive and Guidelines***

All the directives and guidelines referred to in the previous section result from EU negotiation rules between the EU institutions (European Commission, European Parliament) and the member states (the European Council). They represent important tools for the EU to influence the way the Member States can tackle energy poverty within the broader framework of the energy market and the energy transition. When they are adopted at the EU level, it is left to each Member States to transpose them in the national legislation.

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 21 Official Journal of the European Union website, Commission Recommendation 2010/1563, [eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32020H1563&from=EN](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32020H1563&from=EN), 14 October 2020.

### **Multi-Stakeholders' Dialogue**

The EU also offers the opportunity for broader dialogue on this issue. For example, in 2011, the Vulnerable Consumer Working Group was created. In 2013, this multi-stakeholders' working group established recommendations to the Member States on how to define energy poverty, to collect and share good practices in energy poverty mitigation.

### **Open Method of Coordination**

In 2017, the Juncker Commission adopted the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR). In its principle 20, it states that “Everyone has the right to access essential services of good quality, including water, sanitation, energy, transport, financial services and digital communications. Support for access to such services shall be available for those in need”. Although such rights-based principles are not binding, it is expected that the soft power mechanisms of EU benchmarking as well as its Open Method of Coordination will help and support Member States to effectively implement them. The first lockdown imposed in spring 2020 to protect populations against the propagation of the COVID-19 illustrates the upward convergence expected from these soft power tools. Forced to stay home, people needed to have access to energy for normal daily functioning. A general trend is to be noted among most Member States: the national governments implemented adequate measures to implement the right to energy services access as stated in the EPSR such as disconnection ban, payments arrangements or price reduction<sup>22</sup>. However, these measures were limited in time but could contribute to debates on access to essential energy services.

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 22 *Towards an Inclusive Energy Transition in the European Union: Confronting Energy Poverty amidst a Global Crisis – Third Pan-EU energy poverty Report of the EU Energy Poverty Observatory (Ibid).*

### **Dissemination, Monitoring, Exchange of Good Practices**

In 2017 ENGAGER<sup>23</sup> – European Energy Poverty – Agenda Cooperation and Knowledge Innovation – a European-wide research network funded via the European Co-operation in Science and Technology (COST) scheme was created. It gathers researchers and practitioners from 41 countries reaching beyond the European Member States. By promoting international cooperation, ENGAGER develops innovative methods to define, measure and address energy poverty and share knowledge with a variety of stakeholders. By providing recommendations, ENGAGER contributes to raising awareness at the EU level and at the national level about energy poverty.

Another important step was made in 2018, when the Juncker Commission launched the European Energy Poverty Observatory “to provide a user-friendly and open-access resource that will promote public engagement on the issue of energy poverty, disseminate information and good practice, facilitate knowledge sharing among stakeholders, as well as support informed decision making at local, national and EU level”<sup>24</sup>.

### **3. A Dialogue Agenda for Eastern Mediterranean Countries on Energy Poverty**

Despite the subsidiarity principle that limits the EU intervention in the field of social policy and energy policy – both sectors being at the heart of the energy poverty mitigation – this short note aims at showing that through soft power and dialogue the EU managed to establish energy poverty in the European agenda and to promote the uptake of this issue at the national level. The EU experience can be inspiring for the Eastern Mediterranean countries insofar as up to

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 23 ENGAGER website, [www.engager-energy.net](http://www.engager-energy.net).

24 European Commission website, ‘Launch of the EU Energy Poverty Observatory’, [ec.europa.eu/energy/events/launch-eu-energy-poverty-observatory-epov.en](http://ec.europa.eu/energy/events/launch-eu-energy-poverty-observatory-epov.en).

18 million people living in the MENA region (i.e. 6% of the population) still have no access to electricity<sup>25</sup>. And among those connected, millions of consumers may not benefit from a reliable, secure and continuous energy supply. Therefore, energy poverty represents an important issue in the region in terms of infrastructure and reliability of energy system for those who are connected but also for those who are not yet connected. Affordability represents another issue if energy subsidies are to be withdrawn and replaced by targeted schemes.

### ***Networking to Define, Measure and Address Energy Poverty in the Eastern Mediterranean Region***

Furthermore, considering that energy access is an issue of concern in the East Mediterranean region but can cover many different realities in terms of infrastructure, socio-economic realities, housing conditions, economic situation, welfare system, etc., it is important to share knowledge on how to define and measure it and exchange good practices on the way to address it. Therefore, building a network or a platform composed of researchers, practitioners and activists could help collect data on the variety of energy poverty situations and investigate some common features likely to interest the decision makers of the whole region.

### ***A Step Forward towards SDG7***

The European Pillar of Social Rights as well as the EU Green Deal align well with the SDG7, which in turn applies to the whole Eastern Mediterranean region. The implementation of SDG7 represents a way to improve well-being and standards of living. Seizing the opportunity of renewable energy technologies is therefore crucial to scale up the implementation of clean energy access to all. This

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 25 Veronica Lenzi, The Mediterranean Energy Sector: The Role of Independent Regulators, [funseam.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/k2.attachments\\_Informe\\_FUNSEAM-012016.pdf](https://funseam.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/k2.attachments_Informe_FUNSEAM-012016.pdf), FUNSEAM Report, 2016.

involves discussions and decisions on funding generation, transmission, supply and distribution of energy, on developing training offers to workers, on defining the role of institutions such as the energy regulator and on establishing regulations on the metering and pricing policy to protect consumers and design adequate business models.

### ***A Dialogue on “a Just Transition” among Eastern Mediterranean Countries***

Considered as a hub for fossil fuels the region is also confronted with greening its energy mix and reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions while ensuring energy access to all. Organising a dialogue between all the countries in the region to design a concept of a “just energy transition” applicable to the region to leave no one behind could contribute to tackling energy access and reliability as well as developing green alternatives. The concept of just transition is important so that fossil fuel sector-based workers can be involved in the decisions, retrained and reskilled towards greener jobs. Moreover, the impacts of the clean energy transition on the energy prices may deteriorate the payment capacity of vulnerable energy consumers. Based on the example of the EU Green Deal, governments of the region could first identify and address the challenges by the transformation of the energy system into a more decentralised and decarbonised energy model. This can be achieved through a solid dialogue leading to recommendations on how to define the risks of such an energy transition policy and how to mitigate them within the region in order to avoid the transformation process coming to the detriment of some social groups and regions.

# **The MENA Context of Greek-Turkish Tensions – Far More than Gas**

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The crisis between Turkey and Greece over hydrocarbon discoveries in the Eastern Mediterranean needs to be placed in the wider context of Middle Eastern and North African relations with Turkey over the past years as well as geopolitical and ideological rivalries and power ambitions by major regional players. Attempts at conflict management and resolution need to factor this context in and need to be more comprehensive and multi-layered to achieve more sustainable solutions. Close coordination and joint action by the European Union (EU), European member states and the United States (US) are vital to secure the necessary leverage when dealing with the parties to the conflict.

Countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region of relevance and with considerable weight regarding the crisis around gas in the Eastern Mediterranean are Libya, Egypt, Israel and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). A closer look at Turkey's relations with them unveils the deeper animosities playing into the crisis and reveals how Egypt, Israel and the UAE are capitalising on their common cause of multiple problems with Turkey.

## **Libya – Fertile Ground for Power Ambitions**

Libya, divided and in flux since 2011, offered Turkey a golden opportunity to simultaneously pursue several interests, be they ideological, economic or strategic. After 2011, Turkey wished for

a wave of Islamist actors reigning in the Arab region and Turkey ascending to their major strategic partner and a welcomed regional player. This dream was shattered and other regional powers, particularly the United Arab Emirates (UAE) with its anti-Islamist policy, have gained the upper hand. Hence the Turkish government, through soft and hard power, has been widening its support for Islamist actors in MENA countries, thereby expanding its influence and undermining other powers' anti-Islamist agenda.

In line with this calculus, Turkey militarily supported the UN-endorsed Government of National Accord (GNA) in Western Libya that has an Islamist friendly bent, and it helped in coordination with Russia tilting the power balance in its favour and Tripoli staying under its control. This camp battled an adversary camp in the East around retired General Khalifa Haftar and Head of Parliament Agila Saleh, and was supported by Russia, France as well as the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Egypt<sup>26</sup>. Although the ongoing political process and the new united executive authority in Libya might challenge Turkey's policy, for the moment no repercussions seem visible as the new Libyan prime minister Abdelhamid Dabeiba entertains year-long business ties with Turkey and described it as a real partner.

In return for Turkey's military support, in November 2019 former prime minister Fayeze Al-Sarraj was forced to sign a legally controversial agreement demarcating a new sea boundary between Turkey and Libya, overlapping with Greek waters and raising tensions. Turkey's insistence on the maritime agreement was based on economic motives to secure its own share of gas discoveries, a lucrative business considered vital for the country's ailing economy. From a Turkish government's perspective the agreement seemed the only way to safeguard its interest as Turkey was excluded from the multilateral

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 26 This camp is no longer unified, as schisms have erupted among Haftar's backers concerning the future of Libya and which actors to support.

EastMed Gas Forum established by Egypt and Israel in January 2019. The two countries also spearheaded the move to exclude Turkey.

## **Egypt – Ideology at the Centre**

Egyptian-Turkish relations are among the most strained due to political developments in Egypt since 2012. The ideology of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) and its Islamist friendly policies are central in the crisis between the two sides. For the Egyptian government, Islamist groups are arch enemies of the state. They are considered the most viable threat to the rulers. The ability of the Muslim Brotherhood to mobilise and garner massive support in 2012 still constitutes a highly unsettling experience for the regime.<sup>27</sup> The fact that Turkey offered refuge for members of the group after 2013 who were fleeing from repression and prosecution in their homeland, severely damaged bilateral relations. This was exacerbated by the Turkish government not extraditing prosecuted members of the group in exile in Turkey in addition to propaganda against the Egyptian state in Turkish media. The animosity and ideological rift are mirrored in the Libyan civil war where the two countries lent support to opposing groups, and they extend to other areas such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.<sup>28</sup>

Turkey, in line with its ambition for more regional clout and championing Islamist groups, has invested in its relations with Hamas, and many members and operatives reside in the country. This raised tensions with Egypt that views itself as the core mediator in the conflict, and Egypt has always supported Fatah. The fact that Egypt hailed the Abraham Accords signed in 2020 between Israel

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 27 Today, though, the organisation's capabilities have reached a historic low due to their systematic prosecution by the Egyptian state.

28 Egypt and Turkey are divided over other dossiers as well such as Syria and Iraq. From an Egyptian perspective, these two files are more important due to their geographic and strategic significance.

and several Arab countries played into the hands of Turkey and its portrayal of Erdogan as the sole patron of the Palestinian cause. It also sparked harsh criticism by Hamas and Fatah of the Egyptian stance and fed into the Palestinian side's openness for a more active Turkish role.

The initiative by Egypt (and Israel) to establish the EastMed Gas Forum in January 2019 and exclude Turkey needs to be seen against this backdrop. It is a consequential move given these dynamics in relations. In reaction to Turkey's maritime agreement with Libya, in August 2020 Egypt signed an agreement with Greece designating an exclusive economy zone in the Eastern Mediterranean. The two countries also carried out joint maritime trainings conveying a message to Turkey that violation of their sovereignty will not be tolerated. It seems, though, that Turkey is increasingly uncomfortable with its isolation and in the past months, it reached out several times to Egypt for political rapprochement but to no avail so far. It also reached out to Israel, another powerful country that has banded together against Turkey's policies in the Eastern Mediterranean.

## **Israel – Deep Distrust**

Ever since the AKP came to power in 2002, relations between Israel and Turkey started deteriorating. Particularly diverging policies towards the Palestinian conflict led to an acrimonious rift. A serious diplomatic crisis erupted with ramifications felt until today when in 2010 Israeli commandos attacked the Mavi Marmara boat killing nine Turkish activists. The ship was part of a flotilla that attempted to breach the illegal naval blockade of Gaza to deliver humanitarian aid. With Erdogan becoming president in 2014, the rhetoric towards Israel turned drastic, resembling a smear campaign against the government. Ankara's ties to Hamas and Israel accusing Hamas operatives based in Turkey of planning operations against Israel with Turkey's knowledge added to the hostilities.

The Palestinian cause, orphaned because of regional and international inaction towards the Israeli occupation, served Erdogan's ambition for regional influence very well. Through a harsh stance on Israel, he also garnered popularity at home. The rift with Israel was also deepened through enhanced Israeli relations with Greece and Cyprus and the signing of a series of economic and defence pacts that infuriated the Turkish side. Again it seems, though, Erdogan is realising he has been punching far above his weight on many fronts, and he embarked on a recent charm offensive towards Israel. Because distrust and animosities accumulated over the years, the move was met with a lot of scepticism in Israel. From an Israeli government's point of view, excluding Turkey from the gas forum was therefore consequential.

## **The UAE – Turkey's Regional Rival**

The UAE and Turkey are geopolitical rivals, and both sides are on opposite fronts on many files. Like Egypt, the UAE views Islamists as one of the biggest threats to the ruling systems that needs to be countered. Similar to other Gulf states, the UAE fears the groups' appeal inside Arab societies because of their socialist revolutionary agenda, and the Gulf countries insist on their own interpretation of Sunni Islam that does not pose a threat to their non-legitimised rule. The Muslim Brotherhood over decades managed to establish a branch inside the UAE winning followers and organising activities. The government worries tremendously, whether justified or not, they could instigate protests and challenge the political and social order in place. It is therefore almost obsessed with repressing Islamist groups and keeping them in check.

It is Turkey and the UAE that are mostly seeking to shape the order in the MENA region according to their interests and diametrically opposed visions. They have long been influential through soft power, development aid and financial assistance, and stepped up

this engagement since 2011 to also include military interventions and the deployment of mercenaries. Hence both countries were on opposing sides of the diplomatic crisis with Qatar where Turkey sided with the emirate and was also accused by the UAE of sheltering and supporting terrorist groups. In the Libyan civil war they are adversaries. The UAE's anti-Turkish policy on the issue of energy exploration in the Eastern Mediterranean is a natural consequence of this problematic relation.

To harden the anti-Turkey front, in September 2020 the UAE together with France dispatched forces to join military exercises held by Greece and Cyprus to project strength against Turkey. In November it joined the gas forum as an observer and signed a strategic partnership with Greece and a defence agreement, allowing the two countries to station forces on each other's territory and share intelligence. Lastly in January 2021, the UAE and Cyprus signed a defence cooperation agreement.

## **Multilateral Approach – Europe Together with the US**

The crisis between Turkey and Greece cannot but be addressed in multilateral settings as multiple stakeholders are involved. Undoubtedly the Turkish government shoulders the responsibility for finding itself in isolation. Having said that, Egypt, Israel and the UAE share with Turkey – to varying degrees – a destabilising approach to national and foreign policy files that exacerbates and prolongs conflicts. Military policies are easily applied with little appetite for political solutions and non-inclusivity guides their behaviour.

The idea to convene a pan-Mediterranean multilateral conference in principle agreed upon by Turkey and the European Union (EU) is an essential step. An *opus magnum* of diplomacy is required also on complementary bilateral tracks if the deep animosities around fundamental interests of these Middle Eastern states are to be at least moderated. Compartmentalisation of certain conflicts might

prove the only feasible option, but this will not lead to lasting stability. Concessions by all parties are required for more sustainable solutions, and conditions favourable for abandoning maximalist postures need to be explored.

One condition has again proven its extraordinary significance: a responsible US administration. By par of example, Turkey's charm offensive towards Israel and Egypt, or the UAE's and Egypt's (together with Saudi Arabia and Bahrain) settlement with Qatar to end the rift since 2017 have to be attributed not entirely but to a substantial degree to the change in Washington. Everyone is eying the new Biden administration. Europe as well as the US have to address a series of contentious files with Turkey. It is therefore indispensable that the two sides coordinate and act in tandem to gain leverage in dealing with Turkey and the other states.

A particular focus should be Libya that serves as a playground for many rivalries also directly affecting US interests related to Russia. With recent changes in conflict dynamics, it also offers room for rapprochement between rival countries involved in the crisis over gas. Given the mentality governing the parties to the conflict, European member states, the EU and the US need to be willing to apply all available tools including if necessary conditionality, targeted sanctions and deterrence. A more muscular policy should not be ruled out if only to demonstrate a strong normative stance and raise the price for irresponsible policies pursued by too many countries in the region.

# Restoring Multilateralism Requires Restoring Common Narratives

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With nations struggling economically and having to tackle domestic discontent as governments navigate the enduring effects of the 2008 financial crisis, the impact of the Trump administration, as well as COVID-19, there has been a sharp shift towards political expediency aimed at short term domestic political gain as opposed to the protection of a broader vision and model of shared mutual interests. This has been compounded by the inability to effectively influence ongoing conflicts in Libya and Syria that have exacerbated a migrant crisis in the former, and refugee crisis in the latter.

The impact of these crises on policy-making and the approach to multilateralism has been immense. Nations have reacted by becoming increasingly insular, as electorates lose faith in established political parties and as fringe parties begin to gain traction in the absence of a coherent narrative that might address popular grievances over unemployment and a struggling economy. As these fringe parties have made electoral gains, they have been able to influence the parameters of political discussion not only on domestic matters, but also foreign policy. As the argument that the deployment of national resources for the betterment of ‘foreigners’ or ‘aliens’ has gained traction, the result has been that traditionally moderate parties have come under pressure to present themselves as ‘tough’ on perceived threats to national interests. With this redefining of the political landscape, has come a redefining of the political language to reflect the increased polarisation and sense of nationalism so as not only to appear in tune with apparent popular sentiment, but also to limit the

electoral damage of these fringe parties and maintain enough of a mandate to be able to exert influence over the wider debate.

This phenomenon has not been limited to one or two actors of a specific 'camp', but has rather manifested across the spectrum and spilled over into foreign policy, ramping up rhetoric on key issues that require significantly more measured and diplomatic language that recognises mutual interests and that no solution is possible without the buy-in of all parties involved.

In the United Kingdom, this manifested itself through Brexit which was a vote underpinned by national insecurity amidst ongoing austerity, political upheaval and economic crisis. In Turkey, this has manifested itself in the revival of the 'Blue Homeland' concept and surge in Turkish nationalism that was previously tempered by President Erdogan's preference for more Islamic rhetoric that is more reflective of Turkey's ever growing soft power. In France, President Macron's rhetoric has hardened as he struggles to contain the political fall-out with the 'Yellow Vests' and the recent spate of attacks that have exacerbated social tensions. Greek border officials have openly attacked refugees crossing from Turkey, while trust has gradually deteriorated in multi-lateral initiatives such as IRINI as political actors have sought to influence them and direct their potency at 'rivals' as opposed to the problem that needs to be addressed.

Amidst the polarising rhetoric, however, are serious and immediate issues that are concerns for all actors involved, irrespective of their foreign policy aims or disputes. The first is that increased global power competition is manifesting itself through surrogate warfare at the expense of regional stability and security. In essence, this means that competing powers are not engaging in conventional warfare, but rather deploying mercenaries and engaging ultra vires militias. This is compounded by the blurred lines between legitimate political actors and these armed groups which complicates political solutions that are often hamstrung by a lack of effective enforcement mechanisms

to contain the competing interests of armed groups. The result is the creation of failed states in close proximity that are unable to stand without international support, but whose progress is simultaneously hindered by competing international interests that limit the impact of what would otherwise be effective support. Libya is currently the most relevant example of this to Europe where the ongoing conflict has had significant ramifications on maritime security in the Mediterranean, trade and a migrant crisis that has exacerbated social tensions across the continent as economies continue to be rocked by COVID-19.

The second is a migrant flow exacerbated by conflict that has created an environment conducive to smuggling, exploitation and a general undermining of human rights on the part of receiving countries who have in recent times deployed force to prevent migrants from entering their territories. The absence of a multi-lateral approach to this problem has resulted in the emergence of deep-seated grievances amongst Europe's southern states that argue that fellow European states further north are failing to share the burden. The result has been the emergence of hardened stances by these nations that has resulted in migrants being beaten and driven away back to the dangerous seas. While the actions have been taken unilaterally by individual states, the reputational damage internationally has been collective which has undermined efforts to promote democratic tendencies and human rights, while simultaneously undermining the bonds that connect the EU member states.

The third relates to terrorism. With the proliferation of mercenaries from other conflict zones as well as the lack of effective government control over vast areas of Libya, Syria and other areas of Sub-Saharan Africa, an environment has emerged that is not only conducive to the entrenchment of these ultra vires armed groups, but that has also damaged public confidence in the ability of international initiatives to effectively tackle them. Protests have emerged in a number of Sub-Saharan African states questioning the efficacy of international

efforts in curbing terrorism, with some arguments being put forward that the presence of an international taskforce has exacerbated, rather than curbed, the proliferation of these groups.

The fourth is the polarising rhetoric that has already been mentioned, but that also threatens to cement itself politically, empowering fringe elements that not only threatens to entrench a hostile political environment, but also to undermine decades-old established political protocols, customs, conventions and treaties geared towards preventing the escalation that leads to conflict, atrocities, persecution of minorities and open war.

What is most striking regarding these issues, however, is that they cannot be resolved unilaterally. In the same manner that these issues affect the various political actors collectively, the solution must also be pursued collectively. None of the political actors are immune from the social impact of polarisation, the economic impact of illegal migration and the security impact of terrorism. Each political actor has felt the impact of these collective issues in one form or another over the past decade.

Moreover, the reality is that despite the diversity and often competing interests in these sensitive issues, there are common themes on which a framework of cooperation and dialogue can be built. Each of the actors are having to tackle significant domestic issues relating to the economy and with elections on the horizon for many of the actors, tangible measures to address these economic difficulties will be the priority. Yet there can be no effective economic remedy without promoting mutual trade and dialogue. The former facilitates the required investment necessary for relief measures to have a lasting impact, while the latter eases market fears that have often been exacerbated by the political rhetoric.

Moreover, many of the tensions are rooted in political fears as opposed to a desire for confrontation. Turkey frets over the impact of the Syrian conflict across its Southern border as well as the impact

of the Libyan conflict on its maritime interests in the Mediterranean. Greece and Italy are concerned over the migrant burden. France and Germany are concerned over the integrity of the union following Brexit and the electoral success of fringe elements who have often questioned the utility of the union for their respective nations, as well as Europe's place in the global dynamics following a traumatic experience in the trans-Atlantic alliance during the Trump administration and the subsequent reflection that Europe must be able to compete and stand in an increasingly multi-polar world.

None of these fears, however, can be addressed without a multi-lateral approach. This has been recognised in principle by the various political actors through the establishment of joint initiatives such as IRINI which seeks to implement the UN arms embargo on Libya that might exacerbate the conflicts. Irrespective of the controversies over its deployment, efficacy or accusations of politicisation, IRINI serves to demonstrate a recognition on the part of the political actors that multilateralism is the only manner in which addressing these issues can be approached. Moreover, the acceptance of international actors of the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum, led by the UN irrespective of the political considerations of various parties who were reluctant to see it succeed, suggests that a multi-lateral and collective approach to conflict resolution can still secure significant traction in a politically 'competitive' environment.

Therefore, it is abundantly clear that there is an implicit recognition that there are 'national interests' in multilateralism, and this presents an opportunity for the EU to lead on an initiative to restore a framework conducive to greater cooperation. By emphasising the common challenges, the common impact that these challenges have had collectively on all parties, and the common necessity for cooperation to create and engineer solutions that benefit the collective, the EU can viably create a collective narrative that can sufficiently supplant the polarising narratives that have exacerbated the very crises individual parties have lamented, and create the

environment needed to de-escalate the rhetoric and therefore make it easier for parties to engage in dialogue.

In practical terms, this can begin with initiatives geared towards building trust on issues that are of mutual concern even between rivals. Greece and Turkey are both especially concerned over the economic impact of migration and maritime boundaries. While both have accused each other of overreach and escalation, both have also accused the EU of a lack of support in managing the economic impact of migration. While there has been an emphasis on specific issues such as the future of Cyprus and conflicting interests in Libya, there are common grievances that can be addressed as a stepping-stone towards creating an environment conducive for the necessary dialogue. These include addressing the common grievance over migration which is primarily rooted in the perception that the EU has failed to implement multi-lateral policies in addressing the consequences of migration and therefore forced an unfair burden on Athens, Rome and Ankara that has had sweeping ramifications on the local economy and subsequently the domestic political landscape.

This is not to suggest that there need to be immediate solutions provided to tackle these issues. The realities of a global economy battered by COVID-19 has damaged the financial capabilities to sufficiently address the individual grievances of the numerous nations affected. Rather, the emphasis must be on asserting an unqualified recognition that there is a common impact to these issues rather than an attribution of blame. The assertion of a common narrative that recognises common interests on contentious issues can transform polarising rhetoric into one that is at least more measured and responsible. A recent example is Turkey and Egypt where mutual interests in Libya have resulted in a U-turn on antagonistic rhetoric and a move towards asserting commonalities. This is a welcome development for stability in the region, irrespective of the dynamics that are driving this rapprochement.

The onus to achieve this, however, is not on individual states, but on the EU leadership which must present a new vision for multilateralism rather than become mired in individual foreign policy 'duels'. By creating common narratives that individual nation states can resonate and subscribe to, the EU can viably create an environment that can temper the polarisation and harsh rhetoric that have exacerbated tensions, and therefore restore the spirit of multilateralism that is fundamental in curbing an increase in the preference of hard power in foreign policy. The boundaries of diplomatic rhetoric were re-defined over the past five years by the Trump administration. It is therefore imperative that the EU redefines these boundaries if it is to restore multilateralism.

## **EU-Turkey: Tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean – a Challenge to the EU’s Territorial Integrity**

MATHIAS JOPP

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Tensions and conflicts in the Eastern Mediterranean have been a concern of Greece, Cyprus and the EU for quite some time. The source of trouble is Turkey. For more than two years, the country has been drilling with specialised ships, accompanied by naval forces, in the Eastern Mediterranean because of suspected large natural gas deposits. In doing so, Turkey is violating the sovereign rights of Greece and Cyprus. Turkey has not signed the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and does not feel bound by it. Turkey denies Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) of the Greek islands and Crete and argues that large parts of the Eastern Mediterranean belong to Turkey’s continental shelf. Turkey has no official relations with the Republic of Cyprus which it does not recognise under international law. It relies in legal terms of its drilling activities in Cypriot waters on agreements with Northern Cyprus which is recognised by only one country in the world, Turkey.

Tensions increased after Turkey had concluded an agreement with Libya on the delimitation of maritime spheres of interest in the Eastern Mediterranean at the end of 2019, which completely ignored Crete’s territorial waters and economic zones. This unprecedented agreement only came about because Libya (Tripoli) is dependent on military support from Turkey to withstand the pressure of General Haftar’s troops. In the second half of 2020, there was even the risk of a clash between Greece and Turkey when Greece, quite

understandably, sent large parts of its navy to monitor and push back Turkish drilling ships and naval units.<sup>29</sup>

The EU reaction to the provocative Turkish activities was first a bit foot dragging – which, understandably, frustrated or even angered the Greeks. But the EU position later became clearer and firm. The reasons for the hesitating attitude have to do with different interests of two or three groups of member states. The traditional hardliners on Turkey are France, Austria, Greece and Cyprus. They prefer a tough stance vis-à-vis Turkey because of its violation of international law. Notably the French voiced clear warnings to Turkey with regard to its activities, deployed the frigate Lafayette and later the helicopter carrier Tonnerre to the region and held joint exercises with the Greek navy.<sup>30</sup> By contrast, Germany and some others like Spain and Sweden are much more compromising in their stance on the Eastern Mediterranean be it for economic reasons (Spanish banks have given large amounts of loans to Turkey) or for reasons of a functioning management of the refugee problem with Turkish support. There are also some like the Dutch, the Danish and partially the Italians<sup>31</sup> (and the Germans again) who have the clear ambition to keep Turkey in the camp of Western Allies for limiting Russian influence in Eastern and Southern Europe and in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Under these circumstances, Germany, as the EU Presidency in the second half of 2020, tried to keep an intermediate position within the EU and between the EU and Turkey. The country was at least able to use the direct connection between Merkel and Erdogan to contribute to Turkey withdrawing its drilling and exploration vessel Oruc Reis in

29 Ozan Demirkan und Gerd Höhler, Erneute Eskalation im Mittelmeer. Die Türkei fordert Griechenland und das Seerecht heraus., Handelsblatt, 12 August 2020.

30 Politico, 14 and 17 August 2020; Laurenz Gehrke, France to ramp up military presence in Eastern Mediterranean, Politico, 13 August 2020.

31 Italy, which is already at loggerheads with Turkey over the latter’s involvement in Libya, has additional tensions with Turkey because of the blocking of ENI drilling activities in waters south of Cyprus.

late autumn 2020. Apart from that, the German Council Presidency largely left the field to the professional EU representatives, the High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy, Borrell, responsible for the meetings of the Council of foreign ministers, and the President of the European Council, Charles Michel, responsible for the meetings of the heads of state and governments.

In November 2019, the Foreign Ministers’ Council had already imposed sanctions on Turkey with regard to its “continued illegal actions in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Aegean Sea”.<sup>32</sup> Negotiations on the aviation agreement and the meetings of the Association Council with Turkey had been suspended, pre-accession aid for 2020 been cut and country-specific lending activities of the European Investment Bank (EIB) reviewed. In addition, funds were frozen and travel restrictions imposed on particular persons and representatives of legal entities in Turkey involved in the drilling or responsible for it.

After the escalation of the situation in August and September 2020, the European Council in October that year stressed its “full solidarity with Greece and Cyprus” and called on Turkey to terminate unilateral activities that “run counter to EU interests and violate international law and the sovereign rights of EU Member States”.<sup>33</sup> It also welcomed provisional steps of a rapprochement between Greece and Turkey and the intention of the two to conduct exploratory talks on the continental shelf and Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ). In the case of Cyprus, the European Council called on Turkey to refrain from “illegal” measures, to accept Cyprus’ invitation to bilateral talks and to resume negotiations on the Cyprus issue under the auspices of the United Nations following on from the UN resolutions UNSCR 550

32 Council Decision (CFSP) 2019/1894 of 11 November 2019 concerning restrictive measures in view of Turkey’s unauthorised drilling activities in the Eastern Mediterranean, Official Journal of the European Union, EN, L291/47-53. The list of affected persons and entities is available in the archives of the UK government: [www.legislation.gov.uk/eudn/2019/1894/annex](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/eudn/2019/1894/annex).

33 Special meeting of the European Council (1 and 2 October 2020) – Conclusions, EUCO 13/20, Brussels, 2 October 2020, para 16.

and UNSCR 789.<sup>34</sup> Some EU member states like Germany (which was during its EU Presidency partially at loggerheads with Greece) did not wish to only condemn Turkey because of its unauthorised activities but insisted, at the same time, on offering positive incentives for making Turkey rethink its position. Hence, the European Council offered a “positive EU-Turkey agenda” should Turkey demonstrate its interest in dialogue and cooperation rather than confrontation.<sup>35</sup> The offer to Turkey included a modernisation of the Customs Union which has existed with Turkey since 1996, the improvement of trade between Turkey and the EU, travel facilitation (but no visa exemptions), a high-level dialogue on all issues of bilateral concerns and deeper cooperation in the area of migration on the basis of the EU-Turkey statement of 2016. Later in 2020, the proposal for organising a Multilateral Conference on the Eastern Mediterranean, particularly favoured by the German Council Presidency, was added in order to negotiate on sea areas, security, energy, migration and cooperation.<sup>36</sup>

Turkey reacted only moderately to this “carrot and stick” policy of the EU. As already mentioned, it withdrew its exploration ship *Oruc Reis*, but also intensified its provocations in terms of harsh rhetoric against the EU, its member states and EU figure heads. This only resulted at the summit of the heads of state and government in December 2020 in a tightening of the late-2019 sanctions by expanding the lists of affected persons and institutions in Turkey. Nevertheless, the European Council upheld the framework of cooperation with the offer of a positive EU-Turkey agenda, even if the modernisation of the Customs Union was no longer mentioned.<sup>37</sup>

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 34 *Ibid.*, para. 19.

35 See also for the following: *Ibid.*, para. 20.

36 European Council meeting (10 and 11 December 2020) – Conclusions, EUCO 22/20, Brussels, 11 December 2020, para. 31.

37 *Ibid.*, para. 31 and also for the following para 32.

A report of the High Representative on the political and economic relations between the EU and Turkey was published at the end of March 2021 and included an evaluation of all instruments and options including further restrictive measures available to the EU for future action. The offer to organise a multilateral conference still exists, even if the High Representative’s efforts on the coordination of talks with Greece, Cyprus and Turkey as well as other Mediterranean countries such as Egypt, Israel and Libya, are not yet much advanced. Overall, the EU somehow succeeded in preventing an escalation of tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean. It also managed rather well to expand its repertoire of dealing with this issue through a dual track policy consisting of sanctions on the one hand, and of offers for dialogue and deeper cooperation, including the organisation of a multilateral conference, on the other.

It remains to be seen whether this will be sufficient to induce greater willingness on the part of Turkey for agreeing on meaningful talks and whether, in general, more flexibility will exist on all sides without upholding maximalist positions. Above all, however, there is the question on whether Turkey will indeed refrain from new illegal drilling in the EU’s sovereign waters.

There is some clear hope for light at the end of the tunnel due to another factor: the arrival of Joe Biden as American President. The Turkish President Erdogan seems to have become nowadays a bit more cautious since Biden’s policy towards Turkey on the Eastern Mediterranean, Syria and Libya is still unclear. Hence, recent talks of the High Representative Borrell with his counterpart Foreign Minister Cavusoglu took place, as reported, in a more positive atmosphere.<sup>38</sup> Turkey is an important ally of NATO and the US in the region, which is an asset for Erdogan. But this position in a post-Trump re-animated

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38 Efi Koutsokosta, Turkey launches charm offensive to repair relations with EU, Euronews, 21/01/2021 and Agence Europe, European Daily Bulletin No. 12641, 22 January 2021 (“Mr Borrell and Mr Cavusoglu call for improved bilateral relations”).

NATO may also lead to a tighter re-integration of Turkish foreign policy into NATO’s realm. That may well lead to less geopolitical power gamble in an important area of the Alliance. And, on top of this, Turkey would probably anyway not be able to afford costly extraction of gas and oil from deep waters with little economic benefit.

Some in the EU may be right when seeing in the tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean a “test case” of the EU’s strategic autonomy.<sup>39</sup> If strategic autonomy is defined as the development of the ability of the Europeans to take autonomously effective decisions and actions in dealing with external threats and challenges, notably in the immediate neighbourhood, the EU may have passed the test so far. The lesson, however, is that without some military muscle, in that case provided by the French, and without direct or indirect support of the Americans, it may not always be easy to protect the EU’s security and integrity in full accordance with Article 21 of the EU treaty.

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39 Politico EU Confidential, 12 December 2020, p. 1 and 2.

# How to Prevent the European Public from Conflating Islam and Muslims with Terrorism; and How to Prevent the Muslim-Origin People from Constructing Parallel Communities ...

AYHAN KAYA

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The answer to both questions in the title is that both EU and Turkey should work together to attain such objectives. EU–Turkey relations need to be revitalised not only to resolve multilateral issues revolving around migration, energy, security and trade, but also those issues regarding social cohesion in Europe as far as the co-existence of native communities and Muslim-origin communities. To that effect, like many other migrant-sending countries, Turkey also has a lot to offer to the EU to prevent some polarising prejudices and parallel community construction.

## Conflating Muslims with Terrorism

In certain contexts in Europe, security measures to counter terrorism are perceived as disproportionately targeting Muslims, leading to stigmatisation and to the spread of stereotypes, creating diverse challenges in their everyday lives. Furthermore, there is a clear need to discourage the conflation of Islam with violent extremism. Law enforcement agencies frequently have insufficient knowledge and

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<sup>40</sup> Prime Youth: Islamophobia, Agreement No.785934, <https://bpy.bilgi.edu.tr/en/>

capacity to recognise crimes motivated by anti-Muslim hatred. This leads to systematic under-reporting and as a result an underestimation of the magnitude of hatred targeting Muslims.

As clearly stated in the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) country monitoring schemes, anti-Muslim hatred, including hate speech, and discrimination against young people of Muslim background or Muslim communities as such (including refugees arriving in Europe) contribute to exclusion and hold the risk of further reinforcing religious radicalisation of children and young people.<sup>41</sup> While the European response to terrorist activities must be provided in a highly targeted manner by judicial, prosecution, law enforcement and security services, the endogenous root causes should be tackled at the national and, in particular, the local level, in the daily living environment of children and young people by ensuring their full and equal access to decent living standards and social rights, including education and training. Relevant strategies need to respect human rights in order to avoid inciting further resentment.

Politically-motivated violence designates the use of violent means to achieve political objectives. From any kind of terrorism to armed struggle performed by political organisations, or even displays of violence during protests perpetrated by small factions, political violence is widespread across cultures and ideologies. To this day, political violence remains a key challenge to governments and state agencies. More specifically, one can identify two main issues that are relevant to policy makers, but still, constitute a theoretical puzzle to social scientists. These are, namely, issues pertaining to the increasingly endogenous nature of terrorist threats such as 'homegrown terrorism' and 'foreign fighters', and to the parallel rise of antagonistic, violent political factions, literally feeding on each other's

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 41 Council of Europe website:

[www.coe.int/en/web/european-commission-against-racism-and-intolerance](http://www.coe.int/en/web/european-commission-against-racism-and-intolerance)

actions as in intergroup co-radicalisation processes, such as between Islamist groups and far-right ones.

The term ‘radicalisation’ was perceived in the 1970s and 1980s as socio-political opposition to the notions of capitalism and democracy. The meaning of the term had a different turn in the aftermath of September 11. Since then, radicalisation is mainly perceived as an individualised process by which ‘lone-wolves’ became active agents of terrorism on the one hand, and, home-grown terrorism and online radicalisation became more widespread on the other hand.

In the aftermath of September 11, a global war on terror was initiated by the US, first in Afghanistan in 2001, and then in Iraq in 2003 to fight back against the Al-Qaeda and its adherents. In March 2004, the so-called ‘home-grown terrorists’ took the stage in Madrid bombing the central train station. Following such deadly attacks in Madrid (2003) and London (2005), the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe issued various resolutions addressing the growing importance of home-grown terrorism and its root causes.

The so-called “refugee crisis” erupting in 2015, has caused a turn in the transformation of debates on ‘home-grown terrorists’ to ‘foreign fighters’. Since then, the discussions on radicalisation in the European public space are about those on the path to becoming foreign fighters and their returning home. In addition to the rise of debates on ‘home-grown terrorism’ and ‘foreign fighters’ since 9/11, there is another essential element that needs to be analysed: the processes of co-radicalisation between right-wing extremists and Muslim extremists, or in other words, between Islamophobists and Islamists. The term co-radicalisation springs from the observation that intergroup hostility generates intergroup conflicts through ideological extremisation. These intergroup conflicts have a propensity to perpetuate themselves through cycles of reciprocal threat, violence and extremisation.

The cycles of co-radicalisation sometimes lead to intractable conflicts and explain the parallel rise of antagonistic violent extremist factions such as the conflicts between Islamist groups and white supremacists. Such escalation cycles have been anticipated across Europe in the aftermath of 9/11. On the one hand, the wave of terrorist attacks in European cities in the 2010s has created a strong resentment against the liberal refugee policies of some European states. On the other hand, the threatening atmosphere created by far-right extremists against Muslim minorities could explain why youngsters from Muslim backgrounds would increasingly turn to extreme forms of religious ideologies (i.e. Wahhabism and Salafism) and, for some of them, to *Islamist* terrorist organisations.

Terrorism is by no means a novel phenomenon, nor is it limited to Islamist groups and ideology. It is true however that Islamist-driven terror attacks are now on the rise, along with right-wing terrorism which had declined significantly from 1995 to 2001. In fact, both right-wing and Islamist terrorist attacks seem to display some correlation and respond to one another more strongly after the September 11 attacks. There might be many reasons behind this correlation, or co-radicalisation process, ranging from the growing impact of social media on radicalisation and co-radicalisation to the changing definition of politics from being about consensus to being about dissensus. In other words, co-radicalisation between right-wing and Islamist terrorist groups becomes apparent after the year 2001 in Europe.

The reality in Europe today is that not only young radical Muslims, but also other Muslim-origin youngsters are becoming politically mobilised to support causes that have less to do with faith and more to do with communal solidarity. The manifestation of global Muslim solidarity can be described as an identity based on vicarious humiliation. European Muslims develop empathy for Muslim victims elsewhere in the world and convince themselves that their own exclusion and that of their co-religionists have the same root

cause: *Western rejection of Islam*, which partly leads to the co-radicalisation of some segments of native and Muslim-origin youths. The process of co-radicalisation leads some Muslim groups to generate alternative forms of politics of identity based on radicalisation, violence, religiosity and extremism. To that effect, the quest for identity, authenticity, religiosity and violence should not be reduced to an attempt to essentialise the so-called purity. It is rather a form of politics generated by alienated, humiliated and excluded subjects. In this sense, Islam is no longer simply a religion for those radical individuals, but also a counter hegemonic global political movement, which prompts them to defend the rights of their Muslim brothers across the national boundaries.

In order to understand the root-causes of radicalisation of both self-identified Muslims and self-identified natives, EU Member states and Turkey must join forces. Co-funding scientific studies could be a good start, and this could be followed by the introduction of tangible programmes in which the individual members of both sides can communicate with each other to understand the root causes of mutual hatred.

## **Parallel Communities of Muslims**

In several European countries, labour immigration was halted in 1974 due to economic recession and electoral choices. The decision was taken as a result of the 1973 oil crisis and growing unemployment, which lessened the need for foreign labour. A deindustrialisation process followed the 1974 economic crisis, which resulted in the unemployment of high numbers of manual immigrant labour, mostly of Muslim origin. Since then, many Muslim-origin immigrants and their descendants have been prompted to socially, politically, culturally, and even economically, mobilise themselves within their own ethno-religious frameworks through constructing isolated communitarian parallel communities to protect themselves against

the perils of globalisation. The construction of isolated parallel communities has brought about two very important consequences in many European societies. On the one hand, it has reinforced ethno-religious boundaries between majority societies and migrant-origin groups leading to different forms of ethnic competition in the urban space, especially among the working-class segments of local communities. On the other hand, it has strengthened the process of alienation between in-groups and out-groups leading to the decline of intergroup contact. The decline of intergroup contact provides a fertile ground for the spread of Islamophobic sentiments and anti-Muslim prejudices.

Ethno-cultural and religious identities generated by minorities in such communitarian parallel communities do not necessarily translate into their quest for isolation from the majority society. An alternative reading of the construction and articulation of such identities and parallel communities can also be made. One could assume that such communitarian parallel communities are a product of the quest for equality and justice. It should be remembered that Muslims, who are politically underrepresented, intersectionally discriminated, and perceived as a threat to national, social and cultural security of their countries of residence, can be expected to turn inward and establish parallel communities as a response to such acts of structural exclusion and discrimination. Several surveys such as the ones held by FRA in 2017, clearly show the forms and levels of discrimination that Muslims encounter in Europe. Accordingly, there are multiple forms of discrimination that might push Muslims to establish communitarian parallel communities in which they may feel protected: harassment due to ethnic or immigrant background, discrimination resulting from visible religious symbols, such as traditional or religious clothing, discrimination resulting from Muslim names, skin colour or physical appearance when looking for housing,

work or receiving healthcare.<sup>42</sup> ECRI's country monitoring reports also reveal that prohibitions on religious clothing and symbols in various European countries may have triggered discrimination and exclusion in employment, access to basic services and education. This has particularly affected Muslim girls and women.

Islamic parallel communities manifest in European countries such as France, Germany, the United Kingdom, Belgium, Denmark, the Netherlands (countries with colonial or semi-colonial backgrounds) are not the result of the conservatism of Muslims, but rather their reaction to the structural and political mechanisms of exclusion. In other words, religiosity is too important to be limited to the beliefs of said minorities, because what may lie beneath religiosities are the structural problems of racism, discrimination, Islamophobia, xenophobia, injustice, poverty and unemployment.

Although it is without doubt that social and class tensions erupt from such structural problems, some state administrations, populist parties, the media, and even intellectuals, intentionally or unintentionally make wrong diagnoses of, and misrepresent, the issue to the public, which in turn make it almost impossible to solve it. Is it really their cultural differences, their anti-integrationist, reactionary attitudes and their Islamic identity that consider fighting against Christianity a religious duty that takes Muslims to the street? Or, are their mass-opposition and social movements the manifestation of a resistance against almost two centuries of colonialism, exclusion, racism, xenophobia and the more recent conditions of poverty? Answers to these two essential questions provide clues to how individuals, institutions and the state approach the problem. Those who answer the first question positively find the Islamic, the culturally different, and the ethnically diverse "problematic" by nature. For them, the "Others" are expected to eliminate their

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<sup>42</sup> FRA, European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2017). *Second European Union Minorities*, p. 9.

differences and become assimilated into the dominant civilisation project. Those who respond positively to the second question are the ones who have made the diagnoses with regard to the root-causes of self-isolation of Muslims, that is racism, structural inequalities, injustices, stereotypes, colonialism, orientalism and deep-rooted institutional and intersectional discrimination.

As the processes of de-industrialisation since the late 1970s and the rise of inequalities in politics, education, the labour market, health services and the judiciary increasingly alienate Muslims from the majority of societies, they have come to hold on to religion, ethnicity, language and tradition, whatever they believe cannot be taken away from them, even more tightly. Discrimination in everyday life has become common for many Muslim individuals and communities in Europe. The FRA Survey on Muslims held in 2017 clearly reveals that Muslims in Europe often suffer discrimination when looking for a job and this hampers their meaningful participation in society.<sup>43</sup> The same survey also finds that Muslim names, skin colour or physical appearance prompt discrimination against about half of the respondents when looking for housing, work or receiving healthcare.<sup>44</sup> Populist political parties have lately indulged in deliberate misreadings, which result in the syndrome depicting that Muslims are “enemies within” who must be eliminated. Given the problematic representation and statisticalisation of immigrants and Muslims in the media and political sphere, the issue runs into a dead-end. When all misinterpretations and misevaluations add up, it is easy to see how smoothly “next-door neighbours” can be turned into “enemies within”.

Populist parties and movements often exploit the issues of parallel communities, migration and Islam, and portray them as a threat against the welfare and the social, cultural, and even ethnic features

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 43 FRA, European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2017). *Second European Union Minorities*.

44 *Ibid.*, p.9.

of a nation. Populist leaders also tend to blame parallel communities of Muslims for some of the major problems in society such as unemployment, violence, crime, insecurity, drug trafficking and human trafficking. This tendency is reinforced by the use of a racist, xenophobic, Islamophobic and demeaning rhetoric. The use of words like 'influx', 'invasion', 'flood' and 'intrusion' are just a few examples. Many public figures in Europe have so far spoken of a 'foreign infiltration' of immigrants, especially Muslims, in their countries. Some political leaders even predicted the coming of *Eurabia*, a mythological future continent that will replace modern Europe, where children from Norway to Naples will allegedly learn to recite the Koran at school, while their mothers stay at home wearing *burqas*. Referring to the growing visibility of Muslims in the European space, some right-wing populist leaders effectively deploy the fear of Islam as a great danger in the foreseeable future.

Some populist politicians began to unmask the immigration of Muslims as an integral part of a deliberate strategy of Islamification.<sup>45</sup> To support such a claim, such politicians may refer to a whole range of Arabists, orientalists, political scientists, journalists and politicians who may boast a reasonably solid reputation such as Bat Ye'or, Bernard Lewis, Oriana Fallaci, Samuel Huntington, Hans Jansen, Pim Fortuyn and Ayaan Hirsi Ali. Such populist politicians have also openly criticised Islam by aligning themselves with the liberal and civilisational attitude towards certain cultural issues such as the emancipation of women and homosexuals. The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe has also deplored that a growing number of political parties in Europe exploit and encourage the fear of Islam and organise political campaigns which promote simplistic

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45 The term 'Eurabia' was first introduced by Bat Ye'Or, whose real name is Gisell Litmann, an Egyptian-born British citizen and key figure in the UK-based Counter-Jihad Movement (CJM), living in Switzerland.

and negative stereotypes concerning Muslims in Europe and often equate Islam with extremism and terrorism.<sup>46</sup>

EU member states and Turkey can again join forces to work together against the formation of parallel communities by Muslim-origin migrants and their descendants residing in European countries. Rather than religious-based diaspora politics, Turkey can introduce activities and policies underlining civic and active citizenship models for the members of its diaspora so that Turkish-origin individuals may have better recognition by member states. In return, member states can also work harder to incorporate Turkish-origin individuals on a civic basis without framing them on the basis of their ethno-cultural and religious differences.

## Conclusion

Both issues raised in this piece deserve a closer look by the EU and Turkey, that aspires a communicative action away from civilisational perceptions distancing and polarising the parties. This communicative action should be evidence-based and embrace scientific research conducted by the collaboration of researchers from both sides. Since both items discussed in this piece, i.e. conflating Muslims with terrorism and constructing parallel communities, have transnational elements, they need to be assessed with a transnational perspective embracing a multitude of approaches trying to understand their root causes. Both issues can be discussed in the multilateral conference on the Eastern Mediterranean to find ways to bridge self-identified Muslims and self-identified natives to communicate with each other without any prejudice. The multilateral conference can be a venue where both sides can announce their will to bridge the gap between host communities and migrant-origin individuals.

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 46 See Resolution 1743 (2010), [www.assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-en.asp?fileid=17880&lang=en](http://www.assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-en.asp?fileid=17880&lang=en).

## Russia in the Eastern Mediterranean: The Art of Balancing

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Strictly speaking, Russia is not an Eastern Mediterranean country. It does not have direct access to the Mediterranean Sea; its most important strategic and economic interests belong to other parts of the world, such as the North Atlantic or East Asia. However, for a long time Russia has been trying to make its presence in the region visible; this continuous interest goes back to at least the 18<sup>th</sup> century and it results from a variety of geopolitical, economic, strategic, religious and cultural reasons. Today Moscow arguably enjoys more visibility here than even the Soviet Union did at the peak of its global outreach. Moreover, Vladimir Putin can present the Kremlin's presence in the Eastern Mediterranean as one of the most spectacular and unquestionable personal foreign policy accomplishments.

Still, can one argue that Russia has a consistent and comprehensive strategic approach to the region? To forge and to sustain such an approach would be a challenging task for a number of reasons. First, the Eastern Mediterranean is simply too large and too diverse to have a 'one size fits all' pattern to multiple crises and conflicts here. Second, Russia's capabilities in the region – especially in the economic domain and in soft power tools – are quite limited and do not allow Moscow to pursue a long-term strategy guided by a compelling comprehensive vision of the region's future. Unlike the Soviet Union, Russia has no social and economic model that it could offer nations of the region to follow and imitate. Third, Russia's approaches to specific countries in the Eastern Mediterranean reflect a complex interaction of various political, economic and other group interests in Moscow; the exact

balance of these interests may fluctuate from one country to another and from one stage of the Russian engagement to another.

Keeping all these factors in mind, one could conclude that instead of trying to articulate an all-inclusive ‘Putin doctrine’ for the region, it would be appropriate to look at the Russian policy as an attempt to balance a number of diverging principles, goals, priorities and modes of engagement in the Eastern Mediterranean. In some cases, this balance turns out to be quite successful; in other cases, it leads to unforeseen complications and rising political risks. Let us outline some of the most important balancing dilemmas that contemporary Russian policies implicitly or explicitly contain.

## **1. Global vs Regional Priorities**

The Kremlin’s approach to the region has always depended to a certain degree on Russia’s overall relations with the West; any significant ups or downs in these relations have produced direct and visible implications for the Russian posture in the Eastern Mediterranean. For example, it would not be an overexaggeration to argue that the initial Russian military engagement in Syria in the autumn of 2015 had a significant ‘pedagogical’ dimension – after a spectacular Western failure in Libya and a less than impressive US performance in Iraq, Vladimir Putin clearly intended to teach the West how to ‘fix’ a MENA country. Particularly in the aftermath of the acute crisis in and around Ukraine, it was very important for the Kremlin to demonstrate that in the Eastern Mediterranean Russia could become not a part of the problem, but rather a part of the solution.

As it turned out, this initial plan did not work – neither in Syria, nor in Libya later on. The Russian political and especially military presence in the region very soon became yet another complicating factor in uneasy relations between Moscow and Western capitals. Therefore, the Kremlin’s balance of priorities gradually shifted from trying to forge a deal with global players to engaging regional actors – such

as Damascus, Ankara, Tehran, Riyadh, Cairo, and so on. This shift of Russia's priorities took place in parallel with a gradual decline of the US interest in the region and with mostly unsuccessful attempts by the EU to come up with a consolidated European approach to the Eastern Mediterranean. Apparently, today Moscow is not ready to jeopardise its numerous regional partnerships for the sake of better relations with the United States or the European Union. So far, such an approach turned out to be generally productive, but it might lose its efficiency if the West gets more focused on the region and invests more resources and political capital in eroding Russian partnerships (e.g. by incentivising Turkey to become a more disciplined member of the NATO Alliance).

## **2. Standing by Legitimacy vs Promoting Change**

Russian leadership has traditionally taken a consistently legalistic approach to political developments in the world at large and in the Eastern Mediterranean region in particular. It has explicitly opposed any attempts at regime change, even if in the Kremlin they had many reservations about the regime in question. Russia did not welcome the Arab Spring in 2011, it denounced the violent overthrows of Muammar Gaddafi in Libya and Hosni Mubarak in Egypt. Many Russian scholars believe that the events of the Arab Spring had a profound impact on Vladimir Putin's thinking and triggered his decision to return to the Kremlin in 2012. Moscow later supported Bashar Assad in Syria arguing that he represented the only legitimate power in the country. Putin was one of the first foreign leaders to support Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan during the 15 July 2016 coup d'état attempt in his country.

However, this insistence on the principle of legitimacy has demonstrated its limitations. For instance, in Libya the Kremlin supported Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar though his legitimacy was clearly inferior to that of the Fayed al-Sarraj led Government of National

Accord recognised by the United Nations. Neither did Moscow voice its concerns about the Taliban replacing the legitimate government in Kabul. It seems that the Kremlin applies its legalistic approach to primarily political leaders in the region capable of retaining not only a de jure, but also a de facto control over territories of their respective countries. In other words, Russia stands not so much for legitimacy per se, but rather for 'order and stability', which are perceived as the most important values and indispensable sources of regime legitimacy.

### **3. Supporting Secularism vs Islamism**

In most cases, in the Eastern Mediterranean as well as in other parts of the world, Russia prefers secular regimes to Islamists, even if the latter come to power through open and democratic elections. This preference might be rooted in the Kremlin's own experience with Islamists in the Northern Caucasus and in other predominantly Muslim regions of the Russian Federation. There seems to be an instinctive fear of even moderate Islamism, not to mention its more fundamentalist and radical incarnations. Moscow was reluctant to take the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood off its list of terrorist organisations even after this movement had come to power in Cairo and its candidate Mohamed Morsi had become Egypt's president. This is the same reluctance we now see regarding the possible formal delisting of the Taliban in Afghanistan.

Still, there are important deviations from this general rule and even explicit exceptions from it. Sometimes, the Kremlin seems to care more about the declaratory statements of its partners in the region rather than their actual practice. For instance, in Libya Russia supported Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar partially because he positioned himself as a committed opponent of Islamism though he had Salafi units in his army and explicitly associated himself with various fundamentalist clergymen. Moreover, the Kremlin maintains

open communication lines to Hamas in Palestine or Hezbollah in Lebanon though both are Islamic fundamentalists. The Islamic Republic of Iran can hardly be qualified a secular state, etc. At the end of the day, the future of Russian influence in the Eastern Mediterranean will depend largely on the ability or inability of Moscow to reach out to moderate Islamic groups in the region.

#### **4. Striving for Presence vs Control**

The Russian leadership is fully aware of the fact that Russia's economic, military and political resources that it can allocate to the Eastern Mediterranean are quite limited in comparison to what some other international actors, especially the United States and the European Union (but also China and even Gulf states), can bring to the region. Therefore, in most cases the Kremlin seeks a seat at the table, but it has no ambitions to chair the meeting unilaterally. This is the case with the Middle East Peace Process, where Russia remains one of the consistent champions of the Quartet format; this is also the case in Libya and in Afghanistan too. Participation rather than control gives Russia a say in many regional matters without imposing on Moscow the full responsibility for everything that happens in this or that corner of the region.

Syria stands out as a remarkable exception from the rule. Though Moscow must coordinate its military activities in this country with Tehran and Ankara within the multilateral Astana Process, in Syria the Kremlin is apparently looking for control rather than for mere presence. This mode of Russia's operations is unique for its policies in the Eastern Mediterranean. Its efficiency is questionable: many experts in Russia argue that in practical terms Bashar Assad often manipulates the Kremlin, not the other way round. It is hard to imagine that Russia would try to impose its 'control' on any other Eastern Mediterranean state in the near future.

## 5. Favouring Geoeconomics vs Geopolitics

Though Russian leaders like to talk about their country as a global 'security provider', in most cases, Russia would like to see its engagement with the Eastern Mediterranean as economically profitable. Moscow has strong economic ties to Turkey, which at least partially explains a remarkable resilience of Russian-Turkish political relations despite a lot of important issues on which Moscow consistently disagrees with Ankara. Among Arab nations of the region, Russia focuses mostly on relatively wealthy countries like Iraq, Egypt and Algeria, that can become valuable consumers of Russia's military hardware and agricultural exports or can offer lucrative opportunities to Russian energy and infrastructure companies. One can argue that the Russian engagement in Libya had geoeconomic considerations – Libya is a rich country capable of paying for its imports and development projects in hard cash.

Here Syria again stands out as a noticeable exception. Though Moscow tries very hard to get some economic returns on its political and military investments in this country, it seems that this goal is not easy to reach – particularly now with Damascus exposed to multiple US and EU economic sanctions. Experts assess the overall Russian annual spending in Syria at the level of \$ 1-2 billion, which is not a prohibitively high cost for the Kremlin. Still, it would be difficult to imagine Russian involvement in Syria turning into an economically profitable project any time soon. Given the mounting social and economic problems at home and the Russian public focusing more and more on the domestic agenda, it seems logical that in the nearest future Russia will continue to prioritise its economic interests over geopolitical ambitions in the Eastern Mediterranean. This approach might make Moscow more receptive to potential partnerships with external players willing to shoulder Russia's political and military engagement with economic and financial resources that the Kremlin does not have at its disposal.

## 6. Emphasising State vs “Private” Engagement

Russia is well-known for its highly statist approach to international relations. The Kremlin heavily relies on summit diplomacy, state-to-state agreements, intense interactions between bureaucrats representing various ministers and other governmental agencies. Non-state actors – both in the private and civil society sectors – are usually expected to follow state agreements and stay in line with state policies. This approach can be particularly efficient in dealing with authoritarian regimes trying to fully control both private business and civil society institutions. The downside of this approach is that quite often the state-to-state dimension remains much more advanced than any social and humanitarian interaction conducted at the level of non-state actors. Intense and multifaceted interactions between societies do not always compliment interactions at the top political levels.

However, recently Moscow has tried to diversify its kit of foreign policy instruments in the region, allowing private and semi-private groups and organisations to play a more visible and more autonomous role. Allegedly, in Libya the Russian leadership made a strategic decision to outsource a significant part of its activities in this country to private military companies (the so-called “Wagner Group”). Moscow allegedly applied a similar pattern, though on a smaller scale, in the North of Syria (Deir ez-Zor). This shift allows the Kremlin to distance itself from certain high-risk operations on the ground without losing the overall control over private groups’ operations. Prominent Islamic figures from Russia – the most visible is Ramzan Kadyrov from Chechnya – are now making strong statements about developments in the region and might even pursue their own policies in places like Syria or even Afghanistan. It is not clear to what extent these statements and politics are coordinated with the Russian Foreign Ministry.

## 7. Working with Everybody vs Taking Sides

One of the comparative advantages that Russia enjoys in the Eastern Mediterranean is its ability to maintain constructive relations with the opposite sides of regional conflicts: with Sunni and Shia, Iranians and Saudis, Israelis and Palestinians, Turks and Kurds, UAE and Qatar, and so on. Doing that, Moscow keeps its political investment portfolio diversified and hopes to benefit from any plausible outcome of the conflict in question. On top of that, this unique position allows Moscow to claim the role of an honest broker – at least, in some situations. It should also be noted that the Kremlin can always dig into a significant pool of highly qualified Russian experts on the region with a deep knowledge of various countries, ethnic and religious groups. This helps Moscow to avoid some of the blunders often committed by other overseas powers operating in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Nevertheless, the position of a mediator might be difficult to sustain when the conflict escalates, the fighting sides raise stakes and push Moscow for more assistance. For instance, the close partnership with Bashar Assad in Syria arguably jeopardised Russia's long-term friendly relations with Syrian Kurds, and the Russian-Iranian partnership in Syria has become a major complicating factor in Russian-Israeli relations. Continued attempts to take an equidistant position might erode trust for Russia on both sides and might generate complaints and grievances about an alleged Russian inconsistency and even cynicism. However, the alternative – a firm and unconditional support of one side in the conflict (e.g. standing by Bashar Assad in Syria) – has a number of its own shortcomings and liabilities.

In summary, the art of balancing its foreign policy objectives, foreign policy tools and multiple regional partners in the Eastern Mediterranean requires a very calibrated and fine-tuned approach to every engagement in the region. So far, the Kremlin has managed to keep associated risks under control. Still, it faces quite a bumpy road

ahead. A lot will depend on factors beyond Russia's control – most importantly, on the regional security dynamics, on successes and failures of state building efforts in the Eastern Mediterranean and on the level and mode of engagement by the main non-regional actors like the US, the EU and China.

# The EU-Led Multilateral Dialogue for the Eastern Mediterranean and Turkey

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The first two decades of the 21st century witnessed important power gaps emerging from various regional crises and instabilities. Regional and global actors endeavoured to redesign their power through the power gaps. Ongoing disputes in the Eastern Mediterranean have been the struggles for re-establishing power projection since the beginning of the 2000s.

Exploration issues and distribution of resources in the Eastern Mediterranean gave rise to power struggles between regional and global actors. However, contextualisation of the issues over merely energy distribution restricts anticipations. Conflict between Israel and Palestine, the Syrian Civil War, Lebanon and Libya disputes, and especially Cyprus loom large on the agenda of the Eastern Mediterranean. All these issues are closely associated with the distribution of energy as well as who will have a say in Cyprus, Syria, Libya and Lebanon.

The continental, sea shelf and airspace in the Aegean Archipelago, remilitarisation of islands, the Cyprus issue and the migration crisis between Greece and Turkey have an impact upon energy exploration activities turning into a crisis in the Eastern Mediterranean. The issue has gained a multilateral dimension as both sides entered into maritime agreements with various regional states over their arguments. On the other hand, countries like the USA, Russia, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Iran are obviously closely

interested in the Eastern Mediterranean and it is worth noting that Greece as a member state seeks to involve the EU in the crisis.

Considering the competition between non-regional states seeking to get involved in the issue apart from littoral states, power politics rather than the international law sets the tone for the issue. Therefore, it is imperative that the EU serves as an important mediator practising multilateral diplomacy with the aim of finding permanent solutions and preventing instability in the Eastern Mediterranean. Thus, the EU should refrain *fait accompli* and put forward the policies without taking a side in the region.

Current developments in the Eastern Mediterranean directly intertwine long term endeavours to restore the status quo in the southern neighbourhood of the EU and the Middle East and North Africa Region. Pursuing regional policies with military components made power politics even more dangerous. For this reason, the ability for dispute settlement of the EU is to be proven in the Eastern Mediterranean crisis. The ability obliges the EU to include diplomacy instead of imposing sanctions, embargos etc.

Solving the Eastern Mediterranean crisis and disputes between Greece and Turkey by means of dialogue facilitates promoting stability in the southern neighbourhood of the EU. Within this scope, the EU's trust building depends on its impartial stance by utilising dialogue mechanism in the regional dispute. In other words, the EU should reframe its discourse and position in the Eastern Mediterranean crisis. This frame should include understanding all parties' expectations, equal distribution of the economic burden of migration, equal access to resources and seeking for economic cooperation opportunities as well as adopting an impartial manner.

In fact, the EU's efforts with regard to multilateral dialogue are confronted with strong restrictions due to the ongoing civil war in Libya and Syria, ostracising towards Turkish people in Cyprus and Turkey's exclusion from regional cooperation efforts. In this respect,

Turkey will be regarded as an important stakeholder in the new framework of the EU to set. Likewise, Turkey is of importance to stop the flow of migration and for Europe's eastern border security, which is vital for the EU. It is almost impossible to determine a common policy in the region in the absence of Turkey. Accordingly, Europe and Turkey need to take joint action in order to reach a consensus against both terrorist organisations and irregular migration. With this approach, the EU should acknowledge the policy that Turkey implemented on its borders and its role in the stabilisation of Syria, and develop policies thereupon.

Ankara acknowledges the exclusion of Turkey in the East Mediterranean Gas Forum (EastMed) formed by Egypt, Greece, Israel, Italy, Jordan, the Greek Cypriot Administration and Palestine as a containment policy. The US sanctions on Turkey over the S-400 purchase have been the driving force behind this decision of the organisation. Turkey has reached an agreement with Libya on maritime jurisdiction in return for building submarine pipelines to carry natural gas to Europe. The policies Turkey pursued are the indications that it cannot be excluded from the distribution of resources in the region.

Turkey as the most important power in the Eastern Mediterranean and having the longest maritime boundary is the foremost country for settlement of disputes occurring in the region. The EU's attitude and policies towards the region is not in unity and makes Turkey isolated. Therefore, the EU should retain a multilateral diplomacy for settlement of disputes in the region so that Turkey could reach reconciliation.

The tensions between Turkey-Greece and the Greek Cypriot Administration as well as Turkey-Egypt and the UAE have been described as provocative by the EU itself. However, there is a lack of joint policy action amongst the member states, some of whose policy confrontations have been promoted. As an example, France's selling fighter jets to Greece and/or Greece, the Greek Cypriot Administration, Italy

and France's holding joint military exercises have not been described as provocative though.

As some EU members have claimed Turkey has violated international law in the Eastern Mediterranean, this claim has not provided justification. What is more, the ones violating the international law were the member states which charged Turkey with assisting Azerbaijan to take back its territory, which was declared as under Armenian occupation by the UN and the EU. It is clear that the member states do not act jointly but show unrealistic approaches as a result of some attempts to impose sanctions over Turkey, as well as termination of Turkey's candidacy. Any sanctions imposed by the EU are to sabotage the dialogue mechanism between Turkey and Greece. Moreover, sanctions to damage Turkey implicitly lead the EU to get damaged as well.

Additionally, many European experts raise concerns about the EU's attitude, as it could lead Turkey to more aggressive policies and Ankara to further approach Russia, and the anticipated sanctions could be an instrument in interior policy for the fortification of both nationalism and anti-Western sentiment by the Turkish government. Whether these concerns come true depends on whether the EU-led multilateral dialogue for the eastern Mediterranean will be utilised. Also, all pronouncements made by Turkey includes remarks that the membership is of strategic priority and transatlantic ties is of vital importance for Europe's security and welfare.

Cyprus is the most important issue in the Eastern Mediterranean. It is impossible to provide stability in the region without solving this issue. In other words, the Cyprus issue has become chronic. This issue is expected to result in fair, permanent and comprehensive solutions for Turkish Cypriots' political equality, legitimate rights enshrined in law. Providing a solution in Cyprus will set the tone for a positive atmosphere in the region and promote regional stability. To guarantee the rights of the Turkish Cypriots over hydrocarbon

revenues and constitute fair distribution of revenues will be the success of the EU-led multilateral dialogue for the Eastern Mediterranean.

The latest decisions made by the EU for multilateral dialogue have been appreciated and responded positively by Turkey. If the EU takes a more positive approach towards Turkey, Turkey will definitely display a reconciliatory stance in regional foreign policy. Consequently, the EU's approach as an objective mediator rather than membership solidarity in disputes over the Eastern Mediterranean will further contribute to an effective solution. The EU and Turkey should stand together for the settlement of the disputes in the Eastern Mediterranean, in Libya and Syria. The EU needs to update its symbiotic relationships on balance to tackle the complex issues. What is expected from the EU is not taking an issue-oriented side but taking a solution-oriented side. Unilateral decision-making will absolutely deteriorate the situation. A transparent, fair and cooperation-oriented approach will facilitate the solution.

# **The Rebuilding of Lebanon in a Post-Pandemic World: The Case for a New Digital Pound and Stringent International Cooperation to Fight against Financial Corruption and Capital Flight in Tax Havens**

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Lebanon is a state on the verge of bankruptcy. The terrible explosion in the port of Beirut during the summer of 2020 brought the anger of the Lebanese to its height. On 4 August 2020, a warehouse fire in the port of Beirut, housing more than 2,750 tons of ammonium nitrates, caused a violent explosion in the heart of the Lebanese capital. On an unprecedented scale, the disaster left nearly 200 people dead, thousands injured and 1,300,000 Lebanese homeless. The situation has been further compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the World Bank Lebanon had a 19.2% decline in GDP in 2020, triple digit inflation and a projected increase in extreme poverty to 22%. Approximately 1.7 million people are estimated to fall under the poverty line, of which 841,000 people will be under the food poverty line.

The roots of the crisis that Lebanon is going through, however, go far beyond the health and economic dimensions. The protest movement that emerged in the autumn of 2019 brought together different sections of the population, beyond community and partisan affiliations, in the same denunciation of the dysfunctioning system and ruling class. President Aoun's claim to engage the country on the path of the "de-confessionalisation" of political institutions

appeared to be a veritable dead-end, which has plagued Lebanese political life since the signing of the Taif agreement in 1989, ending the Lebanese civil war. The community co-management system and the merchant republic model seem to have lived. The corruption and dysfunctioning of Lebanese institutions – public as well as private – have reached such a degree that community patronage systems have nothing more to offer to Lebanese citizens and only serve to safeguard the interests of the ruling class.

Faced with the scale of the losses, the Lebanese have taken to the streets to demand the departure of all political leaders. While President Aoun refuses to step down, fearing the power vacuum could drag the country into a spiral of violence, Prime Minister Hassan Diab resigned on 10 August 2020. While, on the one hand the post-Taif has made it possible to rebuild a “living together”, of which the demonstrations of last autumn are a living proof, on the other hand it has not allowed a new social contract to be defined.

The coronavirus pandemic is just another catalyst for Lebanon’s deep governance crisis. In the absence of a national political consensus, the government was unable to distribute an allowance of 145 dollars planned for the 43,000 poorest Lebanese families in the country, despite the fact that aid is essential for the most vulnerable households. The many Syrian and Palestinian refugees settled in Lebanon, some of whom have no legal existence, are also not entitled to these allowances. More than 1.5 million Syrian refugees are believed to be living in Lebanon, of which only 950,000 have been identified by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The pandemic has reinforced the vulnerability of these populations, which are difficult to access for national and international charities. The crisis has also placed the approximately 250,000 African and Asian immigrant workers in the country in dire need. While some embassies have organised the repatriation of their nationals, the vast majority of these immigrants, without passports, have been unable to count, in misfortune, except on the help of their co-religionists.

## **Lack of Trust in Domestic Currency at the Heart at the Lebanese Crisis**

The financial crisis already started before the pandemic. The foreign currency shortage experienced by the country since October 2019 dangerously limits the capacity of health institutions to import the equipment and drugs necessary for the protection of healthcare workers and the care of patients. While the international conference in support of Lebanon, held on 9 August 2020 raised emergency aid worth 250 million euros, this unconditional aid will not be enough to save the Lebanese economy. Lebanon needs USD 15 billion of aid from the IMF and other donors, which would only cover the estimated cost of the explosion. However, this is conditional on the application of structural reforms – free-floating of exchange rate, repatriation of funds “stolen” abroad, restructuring of the financial system and sovereign debt, tax reform, etc. – the social cost of which is expected to be considerable over the next five years and is unsustainable in the absence of citizens’ trust in the Lebanese institutions and in particular its Central Bank.

Throughout history, the nature of money has evolved in response to socioeconomic changes. But the three functions of money – as a means of exchange, a unit of account and a store of value – have remained the same for centuries. The value of money is based on citizens’ trust in it being generally accepted for all forms of economic exchange and in the ability of central banks to maintain its purchasing power through monetary policy. Central banks’ institutional independence also bolsters their ability to maintain trust in money. In early modern times central banks gradually assumed an increasingly pivotal role in ensuring that money delivers on the three functions.

Since 2019, Lebanon has experienced its worst economic crisis since the civil war (1975-1990), notably with a plunge in its national currency and banking restrictions prohibiting bank transfers abroad. The governor of the Lebanese Central Bank and politicians are

suspected of having defied measures to escape capital controls. Several appeals abroad and in Lebanon have been launched since the start of the crisis to return these amounts, as the country is in the grip of an acute shortage of foreign currency. The investigation by Swiss prosecutors relates to 400 million dollars which, despite draconian banking restrictions, would have been transferred abroad to Jersey, Luxembourg and Switzerland by the Central Bank's governor, his brother, his assistant and institutions linked to the central bank.

On the other hand, the adjustments to the banking system have been carried out mainly to the detriment of small savers. While most savings are placed in banks in dollars, savers can only withdraw their deposits in Lebanese pounds at the official rate. Galloping inflation has further worsened the public deficit, increasing the cost of debt service as well as the price of social spending. More than half of the population now lives below the poverty line and the middle classes are threatened by accelerated impoverishment. The purchasing power of the Lebanese has been significantly affected by annual inflation, now hovering around 500% and having more than tripled the prices of basic foodstuffs. Speculation is now affecting the price of basic commodities and the supply of shops has become very erratic.

The implementation of structural reforms appears more necessary than ever. Knowing that more than half of the assets of Lebanese banks are invested in sovereign debt and another quarter in high-risk investments, one can imagine the repercussions for the Lebanese banking sector of a restructuring of the public debt. The consolidation of public finances and the restructuring of the public debt cannot be achieved without the financial and political support of the international community. Time is running out, but the suspicions of corruption by the governor of the Central Bank are symptomatic of the structural blockages for any reform.

## Digital Pound as Structural Reform to Rebuild Citizens' Trust

For years, millions of Lebanese abroad helped keep their native land afloat by sending remittances that once amounted to 12.5% of the GDP. In the first semester of 2020 Lebanon's expats' remittances drop by 20% due to the capital restrictions and the huge costs of bank transfers. Banks are imposing tight restrictions on depositors' withdrawals and prohibiting them from transferring any amount in foreign currencies abroad. This has affected merchants, who have to pay for imported goods, and even citizens who need to transfer money to their children studying abroad

The idea of structural reform consists of central bank money in digital form becoming available for retail payments, which in legal terms would be a liability of the central bank. A digital pound could be important in a range of future scenarios, from a decline in the use of cash to pre-empting the uptake of foreign digital currencies in Lebanon. Issuing a digital pound might become necessary to ensure both continued access to central bank money and monetary sovereignty.

A properly designed digital pound would create synergies with the payments industry and enable the private sector to build new businesses based on digital pound-related services. Innovations like distributed ledger technology (DLT), in particular blockchain (which is at the core of crypto assets such as bitcoin), bring both new opportunities and new risks. However, a digital pound should not be confused with bitcoin or other crypto-assets that have been trying to gain a foothold in the digital payments space and anchor trust in their technology. The main risk of bitcoin and other crypto assets lies in relying purely on technology and the flawed concept of no identifiable issuer or claim. This also means that users cannot rely on crypto assets maintaining a stable value: they are highly volatile, illiquid and speculative, and so do not fulfil all the functions of money. A digital

money issued by a trusted institution, such as the Central Bank, could have a fourth function of “digital memory” to track corruption. But consumers’ digital data and records must not be misused. The abuse of personal information for commercial or other purposes could endanger privacy and harm competition. These potential risks should be assessed and mitigated by the Central Bank.

### **The Prerequisite: Transnational Cooperation and Governance Reform**

An EU-led multilateral conference gathering Ministries of Finance, Central Banks, digital and energy providers could build the framework to set the conditions for private data secrecy and judiciary exchange in case of corruption and fraud in the digital world. As the repetition of tax evasion and corruption scandals revealed by Swiss, Panama, Luxleaks etc. have shown, public disclosure of beneficial owners of companies is still missing in too many financial jurisdictions. Secretive legal arrangements attract illicit financial flows from across the world. It also facilitates exchange rate market manipulation. Furthermore, opaque companies help keep conflicts of interest hidden. This is at the heart of the Lebanese Central Bank’s governor’s current judiciary investigation.

Digital and energy providers will be key to ensuring that the infrastructure and renewable energy production can cope with the energy consumption required by the increased energy intensity of digital data mining and exchange. For this digital pound to take shape, it should rely on transnational and digital companies’ registrations being able to identify all the firm’s shareholders and capital owners. If widely adopted, a digital pound could ensure financial stability and monetary sovereignty. For instance, capital flights could stop if the Central Bank as an issuer guarantees a fixed value of digital coins, or if it is perceived as being capable of absorbing losses thanks to the support of a system of transnational Central Banks issuing a basket

of digital reserve currencies. Additionally, using a digital pound as a store of value could trigger a large shift of bank deposits to digital coins, which may have an impact on bank operations and the direct transmission of monetary policy to innovative businesses and bypass failing banks.

The European Central Bank together with its counterpart in Lebanon and in the regions should set the basket of digital currencies' reserves securing the value of the Lebanese pound. As we enter the digital age, not only the nature of money, but also goods and services, is changing quickly. Citizens accept money only if it is highly trusted, maintains its value and respects privacy – an aspect that is becoming increasingly important in the digital age.

If wisely handled, digitalisation and technological advances could also benefit failed states such as Lebanon and transform positively all areas of society, accelerating the process of dematerialisation while regaining citizens' trust. A digital pound would also be an emblem of the possibility of structural reforms and ultimately position Lebanon's merchant and creative activities at the heart of the digital economy.

# The Role of Intellectuals and Media for the Creation of a Positive Agenda in Greek-Turkish Relations

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International conflicts are “not in between states but rather between distorted images of states” according to Boulding (1959:139). For feeding the negative image, unsophistication of the facts is a method. Accordingly, the antidote can be the sophistication on the basis of real lives of ordinary peoples. Today, public shows on TV and online platforms have a similar impact on people and foreign policy decision makers. The creation of a positive public opinion is necessary, and the role of intellectuals is very important to pull the discussions to the rational base. Politicians will follow the trend in public will at the end. In this framework, it is possible to argue that Greek-Turkish relations need such a role of intellectuals to be healed.

It is possible to see the impact of intellectual production in Greek-Turkish relations. For example, Greek-Turkish relations classes mostly have syllabuses full of writings about the chronology of the happenings in between two national states, because history and politics promoted by the official discourses are shaped on the basis of nationalism. Studies about Greek-Turkish disputes mostly have this epistemology to neglect life before nationalism and this manner prevents researchers from writing a history of Greek and Turkish peoples’ relations in the context of locality. Such a perspective may offer many positive patterns and may keep people away from irrational feelings and fears, which create the real barrier to peace and

negotiations of policy makers. What we learn creates our culture and belief systems that build the images of self and other, and then, the images translated into the foreign policies. According to the images, nations are divided into 'good' and 'bad' and while "the enemy is all bad, one's own nation is of spotless virtue" (Boulding, 1959).

Foreign affairs have always been a matter of domestic politics in Greek-Turkish relations. Agitation about Turkish threat in Greek public opinion, depending on official history discourse, has created a negative frame for all disagreements. The Turkish public is more sensitive about the Greek threat during periods of crisis in bilateral crisis, such as ethnic strife in Cyprus between 1964-1974, the Imia-Kardak Crisis in 1996 and the latest developments in the Eastern Mediterranean in the context of the *Mavi Vatan-Blue Homeland* doctrine. During such terms of crisis, the impact of negative news and comments on public opinion, promising negotiations are hard. However, it is the only method to create a positive agenda in between two peoples, finding a way to change the flow of negative discourse from the media to people.

Because public support is essential to legitimise the government's policies within democracies, what is discussed in the public sphere, such as TV, newspapers, think tank programmes carried by intellectuals and public opinion leaders shall be considered. At this point, it possible to evaluate the relationship between the government and public opinion. Which one is effective on shaping the other's tendency? The mass media in Greece or Turkey may not easily challenge the executive leadership and instead faithfully support their policies. So, the leaders may influence the public opinion. The existence of any correlation between public opinion and foreign policy is strongly connected to the tendency of public opinion to follow the leadership of the executive branch.

What is observed in the last decades of Greek-Turkish disputes after the rise of Cyprus question in 1950s is that the Greek and Turkish

publics have more worries about concessions on the table. So, keeping tension low is acceptable, but having a serious negotiation may be easily punished by the voters because any kind of agreement may have several concessions. For example, the SYRIZA government had a big step forward about the Macedonian name dispute. That created a great reaction in public opinion and in 2019 they lost the election. It is also possible to argue that SYRIZA lost the elections because they could not realise their promises about the creation of an alternative to the austerity policies after the economic crisis. However, Greek people were very aware in 2015 that the promises of SYRIZA were not so realistic. In addition, austerity policies are also a matter of Greece's foreign policy. That is why losing elections is connected more with foreign policy.

Andreas Papandreou had economic problems and his Minister of Finance Kostas Simitis resigned from his position because of the wrong populist economic policies that worsened the economic condition of Greece. Greek Prime Minister Andreas Papandreou preferred to use the Turkish threat card because it was sure that any threat coming from outside may unify the public opinion against the foreign threat and may silence the economic critiques. Such a dominant domestic political worry may create a real barrier faced with any negotiation. During that era, modernisers such as Simitis, who saw the major problems of the country but the conjuncture did not allow them to move further to lead Greece.

On the other hand, it is possible to think that the demand to have better economic conditions by having hydrocarbon energy resources may be the promoter of negotiations and progress about resolution of disagreements. In the first years of discussions on hydrocarbon energy resources around Cyprus or in the Aegean Sea, there was hope for domination of liberal minds to solve the problems for the utilisation of economic benefits. Instead, economic factors cannot drive foreign policy directions alone. On the contrary, that could not create a basis for a liberal deal to achieve a win-win position. It is not

a new problem. In the case of the Davos Summit, limits of bilateral dialogue are observed. That was the era of the liberal politician Turgut Özal and he was inclined to find problems on an economy-based perspective. However, a lack of trust and other listed factors created a barrier to go further than keeping the disagreements frozen.

So, the settled dominant tendencies of the intellectuals of Greece and Turkey to provoke mistrust and insecurity about the intentions of Europeans and Turks are one of the most important obstacles facing peaceful negotiations. Political will of the powerful leadership and public opinions' responses shall be in cooperation to carry both public opinion closer to giving concessions as a rational way to solve the problems. Georgios Papandreou and Ismail Cem created such an atmosphere with the support of several civil society organisations and intellectuals at the end of the 1990s. After the capture of Abdullah Öcalan (leader of the terrorist organisation PKK) in 1999, hardliners lost political legitimacy and modernisers, such as Kostas Simitis and Georgios Papandreou had the chance to lead politics in Greece. Turkish leadership had the same direction with the Helsinki Process and Turkey's hopes to be a full member with the removal of Greece's veto. They could not be successful because the dialogue interfered with the rise of the EU as a tool of Greek national aspirations.

Foreign policy matters can be evaluated in a rational way on the basis of the right timing for domestic and international politics. The rise of political vision of a rational leadership plays a critical role. In fact, the role of intellectuals shall be considered as the essence of the resolution and a better future of Greek and Turkish people. As in politics, intellectual populism shall be regarded as another problem in both countries.

## The Multilateral East-Med Conference Is in the EU's Interests

FIONA MULLEN

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At the European Council meeting on 10-11 December 2020, EU heads of government asked the High Representative, Josep Borrell, “to take forward the proposal of a multilateral conference on the Eastern Mediterranean”. The difficulties inherent in bringing all players together is reflected in how the description of the conference has changed. When it was first mooted earlier in 2020, it was referred to as a conference on maritime issues, then an energy conference, then something that might be done under UN auspices. Now the terminology seems to have settled on “Multilateral Conference on the Eastern Mediterranean”.

Very little information has been made public about how far the EU has succeeded in moving the conference forward. Doubtless the many players involved are also looking at the “informal 5+1” meeting under UN auspices that took place in April 2021. This conference tried to relaunch formal negotiations to solve the longstanding Cyprus problem and involved Greek Cypriots, Turkish Cypriots, Cyprus’ three guarantor powers (Greece, Turkey and the UK) and probably the EU as an observer. It has taken around a year and a half for the parties to agree to the UN-led conference. An EU-led conference will be even more difficult, because of recognition issues. When the two sides in Cyprus meet under UN auspices, they are meeting as the elected leaders of the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities. This is something that neither side particularly likes, but it has been embedded long enough that no one loses face when these meetings take place. For anything led by the EU the Greek Cypriots will want

to be present in their capacity as the internationally recognised government of the Republic of Cyprus and as an EU member state. The “Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC)” is not internationally recognised but Turkey will not want to take part if the Turkish Cypriots are not represented.

Ultimately, to get the EU's conference off the ground, it might also have to be held under UN auspices, which in turn would require close cooperation between the EU and the UN. This cooperation would need to be from top to bottom, so that the UN Good Offices team (for whom I have worked both as a staff member and as a consultant) can ensure that EU officials at all levels do not make “rookie” errors on the Cyprus problem. Such errors are far too easily made by the uninitiated. They can range from the simple use of terms to the sensitivities of the various players or how to approach them to raise the chances of a positive response.

Yet despite the difficulties, the Multilateral Conference on the Eastern Mediterranean is a worthy cause. To mangle an old beer advertisement, the EU can refresh the parts that the UN cannot reach, because of its limited mandate. Neither the UN in Cyprus nor the UN globally has a mandate on maritime delimitation, for example. The UN is simply the depository for Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs). This is why an effort at regional cooperation needs to be driven by the EU. It is also very much in the EU's interests. A region in the EU's neighbourhood, in which all countries are pulling in the same direction on energy cooperation, has all kinds of spin-off effects for peace and security. Below I present the most obvious.

**Energy stability.** These include connecting Cyprus, Israel and Egypt to the ENTSO-E European electricity grid.<sup>47</sup> Turkey and Greece are already part of this network. Cyprus, Greece and Israel are also planning to link their electricity grids via the EuroAsia Interconnector

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<sup>47</sup> ENTSO-E website, Grid Map ([entsoe.eu](http://entsoe.eu)).

(submarine electricity cable), while the EuroAfrica Interconnector would also link Egypt. Turkey has also said it would like to build a submarine electricity cable to Northern Cyprus, although it is unclear whether it could do this and remain on the right side of ENTSO-E. With regional cooperation that includes Turkey too, one can conceive of expansions to include Lebanon, which is suffering daily power cuts, Jordan and Palestine. Countries with a constant electricity supply are more socially, politically and economically stable. Countries that are interconnected are less vulnerable to cyber attacks and are probably less likely to go to war with each other.

**Energy investment and diversity.** Interconnectors carry electrons, not molecules. This reduces the focus on the “hot” issue of gas because there is something for everyone: natural gas, solar, wind, biomass and so on. It means that everyone in the region can ramp up electric car use, thereby reducing the carbon footprint. A related bonus is that countries that can offer green private or public transport (both of which are sorely lacking in Cyprus) will be attractive to the next generation of environmentally conscious tourists.<sup>48</sup> In other words, expanding the regional energy pie unlocks a whole range of investments that would not take place otherwise. These include investment in electric car infrastructure as well as upgrading electricity grids.

**Fewer water conflicts.** A third benefit for the wider region and the EU's neighbourhood is the prospects for desalination in a drought-prone region, especially if it is powered by renewable energy. At present, water scarcity presents a rising risk of conflict in North Africa and the Near East. The desalination plants that might address the water issue are an energy-intensive business and are currently powered by fossil fuels. An East Med electricity grid that transports green electricity would reduce both the financial and environmental

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 48 Sapienta Economics website, 'A Green Vision for Cyprus Tourism', available at: [sapientaeconomics.com/](http://sapientaeconomics.com/), 29 September 2019.

costs of desalination, allowing for expansion. Finally, an expansion of desalination plants would significantly reduce the rising risk of conflicts related to water scarcity in North Africa, the Near East and beyond.<sup>49</sup>

## Educating the Politicians

At the moment, offering this kind of vision to politicians in the region is made difficult by two factors. First, they have spent an enormous amount of political capital on natural gas and all the maritime boundary disagreements that accompany it. It is politically difficult for them to climb down from their positions. Second, many are only just waking up to the fact that natural gas is not the route to riches that it once was. On a like-for-like basis, unsubsidised solar and wind energy has been beating natural gas on price since 2015 according to Lazard.<sup>50</sup> The future of natural gas is even more uncertain since the EU's decision to go carbon-neutral by 2050. Politicians therefore need a face-saving way out of the hole they have dug for themselves. This is where the EU comes in: regional politicians need a vision they can sell to their voters that is a satisfactory replacement for the “gas wars”.

To come to a common vision, politicians need to understand the opportunities of energy cooperation. For that, they need apolitical institutes that are bang up to date on where energy is heading and how it can be commercialised. I have one in mind – and for the avoidance of doubt, I do not have any affiliations with it. Either as part of the process or shortly afterwards, a template for commercialising energy on a regional basis needs to be shared with the relevant

49 Kitty Van Der Heijden and Callie Stinson, ‘Water is a Growing Source of Global Conflict. Here’s What we Need To Do’, [www.weforum.org/agenda/2019/03/water-is-a-growing-source-of-global-conflict-heres-what-we-need-to-do/](http://www.weforum.org/agenda/2019/03/water-is-a-growing-source-of-global-conflict-heres-what-we-need-to-do/), 18 March 2019.

50 Lazard website, ‘Lazard’s Levelized Cost of Energy Analysis – Version 14.0’, [www.lazard.com/media/451419/lazards-levelized-cost-of-energy-version-140.pdf](http://www.lazard.com/media/451419/lazards-levelized-cost-of-energy-version-140.pdf), 2020.

energy companies for feedback. Then the ideas need to be shared, bilaterally and privately at first, with various regional politicians. Once the politicians can imagine a future of energy cooperation and how they can benefit from it, the EU-led shuttle diplomacy can start. When this vision has been turned into commercial and political deals, that is when we have the final grand conference with all the signatures and handshakes. It is a long process but one which the EU has plenty of incentives to cut its geopolitical teeth on.

## Addressing the Sceptics

Since there will no doubt be plenty of concerns about these ideas, let me address some of the challenges to these ideas. There are some who will worry that Cyprus will be outmanoeuvred by bigger powers. However, as noted in a report in February 2021 by Professor Michael Tanchum, things are already moving in this region on energy issues. Moreover, reports that Egypt and Israel may be planning to by-pass Cyprus for the much touted East Med pipeline also suggests that Cyprus may be being outmanoeuvred even by its closest allies.<sup>51</sup> There are some who will worry that getting big energy companies in a room will raise temptations to carve up the market among themselves. This is why it is important that the EU, with all its anti-competitive power, plays a key role. Finally, there are some who might think I have personal or commercial interests in presenting this idea. My clients span oil and gas majors, renewable energy companies and large organisations involved in trying to solve the Cyprus problem. I am proposing this because I live in Cyprus, so have an interest in stability, and because I honestly believe it is a win-win for all of them.

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51 Michaël Tanchum, *Greece's Rise as a Trans-Mediterranean Power: Greece's Eastern Mediterranean Strategic Shift to Europe-to-Africa and Europe-to-Middle East Connectivity*, [www.eliamep.gr/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Policy-paper-56-Tanchum-final.pdf](http://www.eliamep.gr/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Policy-paper-56-Tanchum-final.pdf), ELIAMEP Policy Paper 56, February 2021.

# The Geopolitical Environment in the Eastern Mediterranean

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The Eastern Mediterranean natural gas resource promises much – energy security, prosperity and enhanced regional co-operation amongst Euromed states, many of which have been engaged in competition and conflict for decades and longer, if the ‘above ground’ and ‘below ground’ risks can be managed. The below ground risks remain the domain of international oil companies and their partners, as well as financiers. If the numbers do not add up, then the final investment decision (FID) will never be made. Nevertheless, the above ground risks rest in the hands of politicians and whilst they include leaders from all Euromed states, the EU has an increasing desire and will to make Eastern Mediterranean hydrocarbons material not only achieve energy security for Europe, but also regional security for the Mediterranean as a whole. However, it requires a fully engaged EU to overcome a series of challenges that are likely to frustrate efforts to develop natural gas resources and bring it to market.

First and foremost, the EU has struggled to adjust to a changing regional security environment. Whereas the US had proven to be a dependable security partner since the end of the Second World War, especially in meeting the challenge from Russia, its commitment since the Obama years has wavered, even more so during the Trump presidency, though the Biden administration appears to be re-engaging more than its predecessors. Although the Biden administration appears set to strengthen transatlantic relations and is more likely to provide muscular diplomatic support to the EU than

the Obama<sup>52</sup> and Trump<sup>53</sup> administrations, EU leaders recognise that the structural shift taking place in the global balance of power means that over the long term, Washington will be less likely to lend support and, as a consequence, European powers will need to better manage their own security.<sup>54</sup>

There is a clear trend emerging in US foreign policy towards pushing its European allies – and, indeed, other allies elsewhere – to assume great responsibility for regional security, whilst Washington focuses its efforts on China. This has proven to be a somewhat uncomfortable position for the EU, especially as it has had to deal with Brexit, as well as, more recently, the COVID-19 pandemic. At the same time, Russia has exploited the opportunity of diminishing US diplomatic engagement and EU hesitancy to reassert its influence in the Eastern Mediterranean and North Africa. In fact, it has not only been Moscow that has asserted itself into the space vacated by the US, but other regional states eager to fill the gap, including Turkey<sup>55</sup> and the United Arab Emirates (UAE).<sup>56</sup>

Given that the Biden administration offers a momentary pause in the US re-assigning its diplomatic weight away from Europe, EU leaders would do well to seize the opportunity to assert themselves, whilst

52 “What’s Obama’s European legacy?” *Politico*, 21 April 2016, [www.politico.eu/article/what-will-define-barack-obamas-european-legacy-eu-us](http://www.politico.eu/article/what-will-define-barack-obamas-european-legacy-eu-us), accessed 23 March 2021.

53 Ian Bond, Trump sounds the retreat: Can European defence advance? Center for European Reform, 26 June 2020, [www.cer.eu/sites/default/files/insight\\_IB\\_26.6.20.pdf](http://www.cer.eu/sites/default/files/insight_IB_26.6.20.pdf), accessed 23 March 2021.

54 Peter Van Ham, *Trump’s Impact on European Security Policy Options in a Post-Western World*, Clingendael Report, January 2018, [www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/2018-01/Report\\_Trumps\\_Impact\\_on\\_European\\_Security.pdf](http://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/2018-01/Report_Trumps_Impact_on_European_Security.pdf), accessed 23 March 2021.

55 Galip Dalay, *Turkey, Europe, and the Eastern Mediterranean: Charting a Way out of the Current Deadlock*, Brookings Doha Center, 28 January 2021, [www.brookings.edu/research/turkey-europe-and-the-eastern-mediterranean-charting-a-way-out-of-the-current-deadlock](http://www.brookings.edu/research/turkey-europe-and-the-eastern-mediterranean-charting-a-way-out-of-the-current-deadlock), accessed 23 March 2021.

56 Marc Pierini, “New Power Struggles in the Mediterranean”, Carnegie Europe, 30 July 2020, [carnegieeurope.eu/2020/07/30/new-power-struggles-in-mediterranean-pub-82403](http://carnegieeurope.eu/2020/07/30/new-power-struggles-in-mediterranean-pub-82403), accessed 23 March 2021.

they feel that their backs are covered. The EU now has a four-year window in which not only can it adopt a more robust foreign and security policy and push back first against Russian adventurism, but also maximise the opportunity that Eastern Mediterranean hydrocarbon resources bring with it. With robust and creative diplomacy, the EU can strive for a settlement that not only serves the interests of all parties concerned and strengthen European energy security, but also bring together a number of Euromed partners that have been in dispute for decades.

However, individual member states pursuing bilateral matters, which often appear misaligned with wider EU priorities, risks compromising those efforts. For example, Germany has been reluctant to play hard ball with Russia, partially due to historical ties and also because of the direct energy security that Nord Stream affords Berlin – meeting forty percent of its gas imports<sup>57</sup>. Nonetheless, the cumulative effect of Russian military forays into Ukraine, Syria, Libya, cyber security threats against the German parliament, and its use of Novichok in the United Kingdom in March 2018 and against Alexey Navalny in 2020<sup>58</sup> should bring Berlin closer to its European partners, though German Chancellor Angela Merkel has continued to back the pipeline despite criticism amongst other EU leaders. Nevertheless, early signs that the Biden administration will continue to pressure Berlin and also frustrate Russian efforts to complete Nordstream II, which is 90% complete<sup>59</sup>, will further encourage the EU to break dependency upon Russian pipeline gas and develop Eastern Mediterranean resources.

57 Palko Karasz, “Germany Imports Gas from Russia. But Is It a ‘Captive?’” *The New York Times*, 11 July 2018, [www.nytimes.com/2018/07/11/world/europe/trump-germany-russia-gas.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/11/world/europe/trump-germany-russia-gas.html), accessed 23 March 2021.

58 BBC, “Navalny ‘poisoned’: What are Novichok agents and what do they do?” 2 September 2020, [www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-43377698](http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-43377698), accessed 23 March 2021.

59 Bojan Lepic, “UPDATE: Gazprom completes Nord Stream 2 pipe-laying off Germany”, *Offshore Energy*, 29 December 2020, [www.offshore-energy.biz/russian-pipelayer-leaves-nord-stream-2-construction-site](http://www.offshore-energy.biz/russian-pipelayer-leaves-nord-stream-2-construction-site), accessed 23 March 2021.

Against that background, development of Eastern Mediterranean gas has become a higher priority issue for the EU. It offers an alternative to Russian gas exports – literally, in the EU’s own backyard, even though getting gas to market will not only be a costly venture, but will also require sustained political will from Brussels, especially given the dispute between Greece and Cyprus, on one side, and Turkey, on the other, over maritime boundaries and sovereignty over sub-sea hydrocarbons. In that context, the interests of EU member states, Greece, France, Italy and Cyprus are driving EU policy forward and challenging Turkey’s counterclaims and countermoves to secure access in Cypriot waters. However, whilst their collective interests may appear aligned, they are each driven by specific national agendas.<sup>60</sup>

Eastern Mediterranean gas presents a rich mix of security, commercial and diplomatic interests to each of those states, but of differing orders. For example, Greece and Cyprus have a material interest in developing the reserves and finding the most profitable route to the market, whilst defending sovereign waters, situated within their Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs). In doing so, they have drawn together Jordan, Egypt, Israel, Palestine and Italy into the East Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF) and its aim is to promote natural gas exports<sup>61</sup>. The Forum opens up the opportunity to bring together a collection of states together – not natural bed fellows – and place shared economic interests at the heart of the organisation that carries benefits for the Euromed zone. Energy diplomacy has served as a plank of successive US administrations in the past and has knitted together the interests of Israel, Egypt and Jordan. The EMGF has the potential to place the EU in the driving seat of a much wider

60 Matthew Bryza, “Solving the Eastern Mediterranean crisis requires compromise”, Atlantic Council, 23 September 2020, [www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/turkeysource/solving-the-eastern-mediterranean-crisis-requires-compromise](http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/turkeysource/solving-the-eastern-mediterranean-crisis-requires-compromise), accessed 23 March 2021.

61 Reuters, “East Mediterranean states formally establish Egypt-based gas forum”, 22 September 2020, [www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-energy-idUKKCN26D14D](http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-energy-idUKKCN26D14D), accessed 23 March 2021.

endeavour. Indeed, in March 2021, France joined the forum, whilst the US seeks observer status.<sup>62</sup> Of course, the founding members of the EMGF have deliberately excluded Turkey (and Lebanon), which continues to challenge the legality of Cyprus and Greece's EEZs and has sent drill ships – accompanied by war ships – into Cypriot waters to start its own seismic activity<sup>63</sup>. Turkey's exclusion poses a threat to the Eastern Mediterranean gas project and to Mediterranean security, more broadly, especially as envisioned by France.

France has become a staunch ally of Greece and Cyprus and sent a naval frigate, La Fayette, to the Eastern Mediterranean in August 2020 to participate in joint military exercises, and has stationed two Rafale fighter jets in Crete.<sup>64</sup> However, France's interests differ from those of Greece and Cyprus and focus much more on its wider Mediterranean strategy. Its policy is driven by a goal to 'stabilise' Libya, whilst securing its commercial oil and gas interests; help secure governments in the Sahel, so that they can better counter extremism and by doing so stem migration flows from North Africa; and compete with Turkey for influence in the Mediterranean. Eastern Mediterranean gas, therefore, is only one issue amongst many in France's Mediterranean portfolio, but it has proven to have had a profound impact upon the EU's approach to the issue.

It was unsurprising, therefore, that the European Council was quick to condemn Turkey for signing in November 2019 a Memorandum of Understanding with Libya on Delimitation of the Maritime

62 Middle East Monitor, "France joins east Mediterranean gas forum", 11 March 2021, [www.middleeastmonitor.com/20210311-france-joins-east-mediterranean-gas-forum](http://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20210311-france-joins-east-mediterranean-gas-forum), accessed 23 March 2021.

63 Daily Sabah, "Turkey mulls expanding drilling fleet amid hopes of new discovery in Eastern Mediterranean", 30 October 2020, [www.dailysabah.com/business/energy/turkey-mulls-expanding-drilling-fleet-amid-hopes-of-new-discovery-in-eastern-mediterranean](http://www.dailysabah.com/business/energy/turkey-mulls-expanding-drilling-fleet-amid-hopes-of-new-discovery-in-eastern-mediterranean), accessed 23 March 2021.

64 Financial Times, "France stokes Turkey tensions by sending naval vessels to waters off Cyprus", 13 August 2020, [www.ft.com/content/465ba697-451f-4601-b1a7-02eca6680edc](http://www.ft.com/content/465ba697-451f-4601-b1a7-02eca6680edc), accessed 23 March 2021.

Jurisdiction Areas in the Mediterranean for infringing the sovereign rights of Greece and Cyprus<sup>65</sup> but refrained from doing so when Greece and Egypt signed their own maritime agreement in August 2020<sup>66</sup>. Even Italy, which had been more supportive of Turkey's position in Libya, given its own diplomatic and commercial interests, has reoriented towards an emerging common EU position, Germany, notwithstanding. The convergence of French and Italian policy around Cyprus has placed the EU's Eastern Mediterranean policy solidly behind the regional alignment of Cyprus, Greece, Egypt and Israel as well as the UAE in Libya. In many ways, it is counterpoised to Turkey's position and is therefore shaping up as a contest between two blocs: EMGF/EU and Turkey-Libya-Russia.

Ankara's decisive military intervention in Libya in 2020, which turned the tide against Haftar<sup>67</sup>, and its manoeuvres in the Mediterranean, such as sending the Oruc Reis survey ship<sup>68</sup>, two drilling vessels, Fatih and Yavuz, accompanied by three offshore supply ships into Cypriot waters in August 2020<sup>69</sup> has made it a security headache for Brussels. In opposition to France, Turkey will continue to play a vital role in Libya even more so with a pro-Turkey Prime Minister in place, at least until December. In a telling move, Abdul Hamid Dbeibeh travelled

65 Daren Butler, Tuvan Gumrukcu, "Turkey signs maritime boundaries deal with Libya amid exploration row", *Reuters*, [www.reuters.com/article/us-turkey-libya-idUSKBN1Y213I](http://www.reuters.com/article/us-turkey-libya-idUSKBN1Y213I), accessed 23 March 2021.

66 Reuters, "Egypt and Greece sign agreement on exclusive economic zone", August 2020, [www.reuters.com/article/us-egypt-greece-idUSKCN252216](http://www.reuters.com/article/us-egypt-greece-idUSKCN252216), accessed 23 March 2021.

67 Mohamed Eljarh, "Turkey's Intervention in Libya Disrupts the UAE but Opens the Door for Russia", Fikra Froum, The Washington Institute, 1 June 2020, [www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/turkeys-intervention-libya-disrupts-uae-opens-door-russia](http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/turkeys-intervention-libya-disrupts-uae-opens-door-russia), accessed 23 March 2021.

68 Ali Kucukgocmen, and George Georgiopoulos, "Turkey's Oruc Reis survey vessel back near southern shore, ship tracker shows", *Reuters*, 15 September 2020, [www.reuters.com/article/us-turkey-greece/turkeys-oruc-reis-survey-vessel-back-near-southern-shore-ship-tracker-shows-idUSKBN2640AX](http://www.reuters.com/article/us-turkey-greece/turkeys-oruc-reis-survey-vessel-back-near-southern-shore-ship-tracker-shows-idUSKBN2640AX), accessed 23 March 2021.

69 Selcan Hacaoglu and Sotiris Nikas, "Turkey Confronts EU With New Energy Survey Off Cyprus Coast", *Bloomberg*, 18 August 2021, [www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-08-18/turkey-confronts-eu-with-new-energy-drilling-off-cyprus-coast](http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-08-18/turkey-confronts-eu-with-new-energy-drilling-off-cyprus-coast), accessed 23 March 2021.

to Ankara just days after his election<sup>70</sup> – his first international trip following the vote. Moreover, Dbeibeh will wish to maintain Turkish military support to safeguard against future risk of conflict; and Turkey is eager to maintain close ties with Tripoli, not least to ensure the continuation of its maritime agreement which provides a multi-lateral angle to its claims, and negotiating position, in the Eastern Mediterranean. Despite being a signatory to the Berlin Conference outcomes which call upon foreign states active in Libya to uphold the UN arms embargo<sup>71</sup>, Turkey will not give up its position – militarily or politically – easily. Libya acts as a theatre for Turkey to assert itself within the region and counter competing interests, both ideological and geopolitical.

Turkey believes that the EU's Achilles Heel is Germany and its overriding fear that Ankara will desist from 'holding back' refugees from flowing into Europe will put a brake on any strong moves made against it. In this sense, Ankara appears to have calculated that in spite of mobilising support behind Greece and Cyprus, French calls for sanctions against Turkey will fail to mobilise, as the division at the heart of the EU between Paris and Berlin will result in stalemate and inaction.

The Eastern Mediterranean may well be the one issue that catalyses a unified EU foreign policy and security response, though Germany remains an outlier. The significance of the region to the EU has grown first because the US appeared to step back, whilst Turkey (and Russia) stepped into the fray. Second, Brussels will seek greater energy security from the Eastern Mediterranean resource endowment in order to break its dependency on Russian hydrocarbons and the Biden

70 Hurriyet Daily News, "Turkey welcomes approval of Libya's new government", 11 March 2021, [www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkey-welcomes-approval-of-libyas-new-government-163039](http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkey-welcomes-approval-of-libyas-new-government-163039), accessed 23 March 2021.

71 "The Berlin Conference on Libya – Conference Conclusions (19 January 2020)", [www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/country-files/libya/news/2020/article/the-berlin-conference-on-libya-conference-conclusions-19-jan-2020](http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/country-files/libya/news/2020/article/the-berlin-conference-on-libya-conference-conclusions-19-jan-2020), accessed 23 March 2021.

administration will likely push hard on this agenda. Third, the creation of the EMGF offers a means of drawing together key Mediterranean states into a mutually beneficial arrangement helping overcome old enmities and locking in economic interests. However, this means being prepared to push back against an assertive Turkish policy in the Mediterranean; and whilst France and other member states may be willing to do this, it is unclear that Germany and, indeed, Eastern European states are willing to push Ankara too far, as the prospect of further refugees and migrants entering Europe remains an emotive issue.

# Competition in the Eastern Mediterranean: The Greek Perspective

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Geopolitics and gas have reshaped the balance of power in the Eastern Mediterranean during the last decade. The discovery of valuable gas findings and competition over exploration and drilling has increased both tension over disputed maritime zones and functioned as a catalyst for energy cooperation. At the same time, the wars in Syria and Libya have opened up new areas of confrontation and cooperation, between regional actors and led to much greater engagement of the US and Russia in the region. On top of that, following a period of great economic growth and investment in the military industry, Turkey has decided to upgrade its role in the region and thus has become increasingly assertive in the region, taking dynamic diplomatic initiatives and often aggressive unilateral actions.

In this context, Greece and Cyprus have adopted a regional approach based on three levels: First, they have formed trilateral and multilateral regional initiatives, aiming to highlight their role as factors of stability. Second, they have also promoted their natural gas exploration and drilling projects off the coast of Cyprus and Crete, including the EastMed pipeline. And third, they have used these regional initiatives and energy projects, as well as EU-Turkey relations, in order to exert pressure on Turkey to resolve the Cyprus issue (Crans Montana talks in 2017), return to exploratory talks on maritime zones and show the regional support they enjoy, vis-à-vis unilateral Turkish military activities in disputed maritime zones.

The two countries' trilateral and multilateral initiatives include:

- **Greece-Cyprus-Egypt:** A trilateral scheme inaugurated in 2014 and sealed with the adoption of the Cairo Declaration, in which the three countries expressed their aim to promote peace, stability, security and prosperity in the region.
- **Greece-Cyprus-Israel:** The first trilateral summit took place in Jerusalem in 2016, with the leaders of the three countries underlying the importance of closer cooperation and of a coordinated set of policies, but also that they stand ready to welcome other like-minded parties to join efforts of promoting coordination, cooperation, as well as regional peace and stability.
- **Greece-Cyprus-Jordan:** The first trilateral meeting took place in Nicosia in 2018 with the leaders of the three countries signing a memorandum on cooperation in the field of renewable energy, as well as agreements for the protection, transfer and promotion of cultural property.
- **Greece-Cyprus-Israel + US:** In 2019 the meeting was upgraded, as the US threw weight behind the trilateral mechanism established by Israel, Greece and Cyprus, noting the importance of increased cooperation. On 2 January 2020 the three countries signed a deal for the ambitious EastMed pipeline which enjoys the backing of the US.
- **East Med Gas Forum:** EMGF or EGF is an international organisation formed by Cyprus, Egypt, Greece, Israel, Italy, Jordan and Palestine. It was established as an international body on 16 January 2020 and its headquarters are located in Cairo. France asked to join the Forum as a member, while the European Union and UAE wish to join as permanent observers.
- **“Philia Forum”:** The first meeting of the participating countries Greece, Cyprus, Egypt, UAE, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and France took place in Athens in February 2021 forming a partnership that could act as a bridge of peace and prosperity connecting the EastMed and the Gulf with the Balkans and the rest of Europe.

To a great extent – and in different ways – the US and France have supported this strategy, while at the same time they have underlined the importance of keeping Turkey “in the West” as an important ally and partner in NATO and the EU. For example, the US has adopted the EastMed Act aimed at supporting the EastMed pipeline, participated in the 3+1 Initiative and was instrumental in the formation of the EastMed Gas Forum, which did not include Turkey. France, for its part, has supported the “Philia Forum”, as well as the efforts of Greece and Cyprus for sanctions on Turkey over its violations of international law in the Eastern Mediterranean, while strengthening bilateral defence ties with both countries.

Turkey considers that the strategy of Greece and Cyprus is an effort to contain and exclude it from energy projects in the region, while any effort to resolve issues has not been genuinely pursued by Athens and Nicosia. After all, it is clear that the strategy of Greece and Cyprus is at least partly based on taking advantage of the rift created in relations between Turkey and countries in the broader region (Egypt, Israel, Saudi Arabia-UAE) as well as the US and France, as Ankara has tried to increasingly assert its role as: a naval force in the Mediterranean, a beacon of political Islam with global reach and a strong player in the wars in Libya and Syria. Increasing defence cooperation and common military exercises carried out by countries participating in the regional initiatives mentioned before have been a further cause for Turkish concern.

On this basis, Turkey reacted more and more assertively to regional initiatives by Greece and Cyprus, making it increasingly more clear that it considers them part of a strategy to exclude it from the region and violate its rights. For example, commenting on the statements made by Greek Foreign Minister Nikos Dendias after the “Philia (Friendship) Forum”, the Turkish Foreign Ministry said that the forum in reality is an “attempt to form an alliance built upon hostility towards Turkey”. “It is not possible for any forum not including Turkey, the key country in its region, and Turkish Cypriots,

to constitute an effective and successful mechanism of cooperation and friendship with regard to the challenges in the region,” said Turkey’s Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hami Aksoy in a statement. This stance has followed a year in which Turkey took advantage of a pre-electoral policy of Donald Trump leading to partial disengagement from the region, the failure of the EU to promote a coherent policy in the Eastern Mediterranean or to have a strong role in Syria and Libya, the lack of a common US-EU strategy, as well as western fears of the increasing role of Russia in the region, to fill a part of the regional geo-political vacuum.

In this context President Erdogan has aggressively promoted what he calls the “Blue Homeland” of Turkish maritime zones in the Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean. Turkey carried out illegal drilling off the coast of Cyprus, signed a memorandum with the government of Libya delimiting a maritime zone that completely disregards the existence of Crete and other Greek islands, while a Turkish research ship accompanied by warships carried out research for three months in disputed waters. At the same time though, faced with American and Canadian sanctions as well as the prospect of European sanctions, Turkey accepted to open up new prospects for dialogue in 2021.

The conditions for a restart of US-Turkish dialogue following the change of the US administration are already under discussion between Washington and Ankara, while the revitalisation of the EU-Turkey strategic dialogue and a possible EU Multilateral Summit with Turkey on the Eastern Mediterranean was discussed at the European Council at the end of March 2021. At the same time, exploratory talks on maritime zones between Greece and Turkey have restarted and a new round of talks on the Cyprus issue took place in April 2021.

It is thus important to re-examine the future role of regional initiatives in the Eastern Mediterranean. It is vital for these initiatives to continue, with a message that highlights the importance and benefits of regional cooperation on the basis of mutual respect and

international law. They must serve to pressure Turkey to engage constructively in the region including through working for peace and stability in Libya and Syria, respecting international law in the Eastern Mediterranean and resolving issues in Cyprus and with Greece. At the same time, though, there must be a strategy of keeping the door open to Turkey recognising the enhanced role of Ankara in the region and the importance of its participation in energy projects, on the basis of international law. It is not necessary that all regional diplomatic and energy initiatives include Turkey. But they must be integrated into a wider strategy of pressure and engagement aimed at promoting peace and stability and resolving issues with Turkey on the basis of international law. If not, they will send the wrong message of “containment and exclusion” to Ankara, thus worsening tensions at the expense of peace and stability in the region.

## Danger in the Waters but Cooperation Awaits

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Greece approaches developments in the Eastern Mediterranean on the basis of two premises: the first is that the Greek-Turkish dialogue exclusively aims at delimiting the continental shelves of the two countries in line with UNCLOS. And the second is that the Cyprus Question is an international problem that needs to be solved under the UN aegis. Both premises contradict the policies of Turkey. Ankara interprets dialogue with Athens in broader terms, while it does not recognise the Republic of Cyprus, and has recently pushed for a two-state solution that contradicts the UN framework. This differentiation of views is crystallised and creates a blurred landscape where tensions often overshadow cooperation opportunities. The period from August until November 2020 witnessed a serious Greek-Turkish crisis in the Eastern Mediterranean, certainly the longest one since the Turkish invasion of Cyprus in 1974. The reason for the escalation was the research activity of the Turkish seismic vessel 'Oruc Reis' in undelimited waters on the basin that Greece believes belong to its own continental shelf. The navies of Greece and Turkey were deployed opposite each other for some time and the possibility of a military incident was not unlikely.

Oruc Reis returned to the port of Antalya at the end of November 2020. Being encouraged by both the EU, the USA and members of the UN Security Council such as Russia and China, Greece and Turkey restarted, at the beginning of 2021, the so-called exploratory talks, which had been interrupted in 2016. The relaunch itself is positive because it has the potential to contribute to the reduction of tensions. In the absence of those talks, Greek-Turkish relations entered a phase of misunderstandings that culminated in the standoff during the second half of 2020. The format of the exploratory talks allows the Greek and the Turkish delegations to informally exchange views. The aim is to reach common ground at the technical and diplomatic level in order for the political leadership of the two countries to make decisions. A good understanding in the discussion of these delegations does not automatically lead to political breakthroughs – as historical experience indicates.

As already mentioned, Greece fends off Turkish tactics to move discussions beyond the delimitation of maritime zones and sovereign rights to other themes. These include the demilitarisation of some Aegean islands and the sovereignty of some Aegean islets. Synoptically, Greece perceives Turkey as a threat and considers the militarisation of Aegean islands critical for its national security. Also, it is not prepared to engage in consultations about issues addressed in international agreements signed in the past, such as the 1923 Lausanne Treaty and the 1947 Paris Treaty. In the last decades, especially from the mid-1990s onwards, Ankara has been keen to revisit some terms of previous international agreements in its own way and has formulated its foreign policy accordingly. The Imia crisis of 1996 was a characteristic example of the determination of Turkey to question the sovereignty of islets, located beyond three nautical miles of the Turkish coast, although the Lausanne Treaty limits Turkish sovereignty – with the exception of Imbros, Tenedos and the Rabbit islands – to islands lying within a limit of three nautical miles. Ankara calls Imia ‘Kardak’ and officially says that they were never ceded to Greece by name.

Athens believes that a joint Greek-Turkish recourse to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) might offer a potential solution to the delimitation of continental shelves. In this respect, the Greek government sent in January 2015, under the then Minister of Foreign Affairs Evangelos Venizelos, a declaration to the ICJ in which it recognised its jurisdiction with respect to all legal disputes, with the exception of: a) any dispute relating to military activities and measures taken by Greece for the protection of its sovereignty and territorial integrity, for national defence purposes, as well as for the protection of its national security; b) any dispute concerning state boundaries or sovereignty over the territory of Greece, including any dispute over the breadth and limits of its territorial sea and its airspace; c) any dispute in respect of which any other party to the dispute has accepted the compulsory jurisdiction of the Court only in relation to or for the purpose of that dispute; or where the acceptance of the Court's compulsory jurisdiction on behalf of any other party to the dispute was deposited or ratified less than twelve months prior to the filing of the application bringing the dispute before the Court.<sup>72</sup> Nonetheless, Greece is able to submit before the ICJ any dispute, with the exception of the aforementioned cases, through the negotiation of a special agreement.

The hypothesis that Greek-Turkish negotiations only concentrate on maritime zones, does not suffice to solve the problem. The positions of the two countries remain contradictory. Greece, the Republic of Cyprus and the EU on the whole have criticised the November 2019 Turkey-Libya Memorandum of Understanding on the delimitation of maritime jurisdictions in the Eastern Mediterranean. In the view of the EU Council, this Memorandum of Understanding 'infringes upon the sovereign rights of third States, does not comply with the Law of the Sea and cannot produce any legal consequences for third

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72 International Court of Justice website, Declarations Recognising the Jurisdiction of the Court as Compulsory, [www.icj-cij.org/en/declarations/gr](http://www.icj-cij.org/en/declarations/gr), 14 January 2015.

States.<sup>73</sup> Greece, in particular, considers it as null and void because it ignores the rights of the islands to a continental shelf and presents its own relative agreements with Egypt and Italy (signed in the summer of 2020) as paradigms of respect of the Law of the Sea and the influence of islands for delimitations. Turkey disagrees and offers its own interpretation of the Law of the Sea, while it does not refrain from frequently proceeding with drilling activities in Cypriot waters with its own vessels. The EU Council portrays these drilling activities as ‘illegal’ and expresses its solidarity with Greece and Cyprus on a systematic basis.<sup>74</sup>

In theory, a multilateral conference will bring Eastern Mediterranean participants with contradictory postures to the same table, among others Greece, the Republic of Cyprus and Turkey. A thorn is the representation of the island of Cyprus without a prior solution of the Cyprus Question. The legal personality of the Republic of Cyprus – a member state of the UN and the EU – needs to be respected and a formula for the participation of the Turkish-Cypriot community to be found. This might be an insurmountable obstacle for the European diplomacy during the preparatory work. The effort will be possibly exacerbated by the deadlock in the April 2021 UN informal talks on the Cyprus Question. Additional thorns are the representation of Libya and Syria due to the volatility in both countries after the disastrous civil wars. Even if an exit from the labyrinth of political representations is found, the definition of the agenda of a multilateral conference will add to difficulties. The EU ought perhaps to play the card of issues that are not very sensitive and create a positive agenda on issues such as the management of the COVID-19 pandemic, the role of women in society, culture, the refugee crisis, tourism, economic co-operation and investments.

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73 EU Council website, Conclusions, [www.consilium.europa.eu/media/41768/12-euco-final-conclusions-en.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/41768/12-euco-final-conclusions-en.pdf), 12 December 2019.

74 Ibid.

The EU is not expected to act as 'deus ex machina' and solve long-standing problems. What it can do is to play a creative role in order to render conditions for peace and prosperity conducive. The dialogue, either in bilateral or in multilateral form, is the only way forward. A signal of regional collaboration under the EU umbrella will push for a better political understanding that is currently missing in the Eastern Mediterranean. The existing animosity and antagonism in the basin are not antithetical to an ambitious and promising European plan in order to join forces against common dangers and risks.

# Energy Security Necessitates Dispute Resolution: An Analysis from a Turkish Perspective

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Hydrocarbon resources began to be discovered in the Eastern Mediterranean in 2009. With this development which necessitates delimitation of maritime boundaries in the Eastern Mediterranean, disputes between states embroiled in long-standing political problems in the region resurfaced. Contrary to earlier expectations that gas discoveries might lead to cooperation and become a peace dividend for the region, it has merely fuelled existing tensions. Overlapping claims over the Aegean Sea and Eastern Mediterranean that cause tension between Turkey and Greece escalated further following the exploration activities of Turkey's seismic research vessel Oruç Reis and Greece's military deployment and military drills on the Greek islands near to Turkey's coastline that should remain demilitarised according to the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne and the 1947 Paris Peace Treaty.

NATO General Secretary Jen Stoltenberg's efforts to prevent any accidents by holding military technical meetings between Turkey and Greece, two NATO allies, resulting in a cancellation of any military drills and Chancellor Merkel's mediation effort to convince two countries to come to the negotiation table yielded a positive outcome. Hence, Greece and Turkey restarted exploratory talks and the 61st round was held in Istanbul on 25 January 2021 and the 62nd of round was held

in Athens on 26 March 2021. Exploratory talks provide a platform for dialogue in which both sides explore reasons of their disagreements and a methodology to solve them. These periodical rounds of talks were held 60 times between Turkey and Greece between 2002 and 2016. There are various contentious issues between the two states waiting to be resolved for a long time. Cooperation established by dialogue between Greece and Turkey can provide benefits for both sides. That is why exploratory talks and their positive outcomes are important.

### **Understanding Disagreements between Turkey and Greece**

Disagreements between Turkey and Greece range from delimitation of territorial waters, the continental shelf, the Exclusive Economic Zone, airspace, the status of rocks and islets, the demilitarised status of some Greek islands, to the Cyprus issue. The proximity of some Greek islands to the Turkish coasts causes problems in reaching an agreement on the maritime boundary between Greece and Turkey in the Aegean Sea. In maritime boundary delimitation, islands may have full, partial or no effect. In international law, there is no automatic claim that islands generate full maritime jurisdiction areas. Islands are ignored or given limited effect in maritime boundary delimitation if their location distorts equitable delimitation. In maritime delimitation, Greece gives full effect to Greek islands that distorts equitable delimitation, ignoring Turkey's rights as the country with the Aegean's longest coastal shore.<sup>75</sup> Turkey has rejected the maritime boundary claims by Greece arguing that the Aegean Sea is a common sea between Turkey and Greece that requires mutual consent and fair and equitable maritime boundary delimitation.<sup>76</sup>

75 Ambassador Cagatay Erciyes (2019) Maritime Issues, Maritime Boundary Delimitation, & Turkey's Off-shore Activities In the Eastern Mediterranean, [www.mfa.gov.tr/site\\_media/html/maritime-delimitation-10-5-2019-presentation.pdf](http://www.mfa.gov.tr/site_media/html/maritime-delimitation-10-5-2019-presentation.pdf).

76 Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Background Note on Aegean Disputes. [www.mfa.gov.tr/background-note-on-aegean-disputes.en.mfa](http://www.mfa.gov.tr/background-note-on-aegean-disputes.en.mfa).

Moreover, bilateral Maritime Boundary Delimitation (MBDs) agreements should be based on equity and non-violation of the rights of third parties. For instance, the MBD agreement signed between Greece and Egypt violates Turkey's rights. Turkey announced that it is ready to launch MBD talks with all Eastern Mediterranean countries except the Greek Cypriot Administration (GCA). Before the settlement of the Cyprus issue, Turkey does not recognise any unilateral actions of the GCA including MBD agreements it signed with third countries and its off-shore activities. Turkish Cypriots who are the co-owners of the island should have equal rights over the natural resources of Cyprus that includes establishing a joint committee on gas drilling and sharing equally the gas revenue and funding of possible settlement. The Greek Cypriot Administration's unilateral MBD agreements with some regional countries disregard these rights of Turkish Cypriots.<sup>77</sup>

Besides this, the exclusion of Turkey and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus from the East Med Gas Forum – a regional forum established for exploring, drilling, sharing hydrocarbon reserves of the Eastern Mediterranean – has raised tension in the region rather than contributing to regional cooperation on energy. Turkey sees the East Med Gas Forum as an anti-Turkish Forum.<sup>78</sup> Ankara proposed to hold a regional conference with all coastal states including the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) on Eastern Mediterranean disputes<sup>79</sup>. In addition to MBDs, another contentious issue between Turkey and Greece is territorial waters. The Greek extension

77 Çağatay Erciyes (9/12/2019). Addressing the East Mediterranean Maritime Dispute and Unilateral Activities: Factual Background & International Law & Turkish Standpoint, [www.mfa.gov.tr/site\\_media/html/addressing-the-east-mediterranean-maritime-dispute-and-unilateral-activities-9-12-2019.pdf](http://www.mfa.gov.tr/site_media/html/addressing-the-east-mediterranean-maritime-dispute-and-unilateral-activities-9-12-2019.pdf).

78 Aylin Ünver Noi (1/10/2020) Is There Still Way Forward to Cooperation in the Eastern Mediterranean? FACM, [www.fundacionacm.org/es/2020/10/01/is-there-a-still-way-forward-to-cooperation-in-the-eastern-mediterranean](http://www.fundacionacm.org/es/2020/10/01/is-there-a-still-way-forward-to-cooperation-in-the-eastern-mediterranean).

79 Daily Sabah (22/09/2020). Turkey Proposes Regional Conference on East Med Disputes, Erdoğan Says, [www.dailysabah.com/politics/diplomacy/turkey-proposes-regional-conference-on-east-med-disputes-erdogan-says](http://www.dailysabah.com/politics/diplomacy/turkey-proposes-regional-conference-on-east-med-disputes-erdogan-says).

of her territorial waters beyond the present 6 miles in the Aegean Sea depriving Turkey from her basic rights of access to high seas from her territorial waters is also *casus belli* according to the 1995 Turkish Parliament decision<sup>80</sup>.

Another contentious issue between Turkey and Greece is the problem of airspace. Airspace cannot exceed territorial waters according to international law. Accordingly, half of the Aegean Sea airspace is international airspace which is not under the sovereignty of any nation. Although Greek territorial waters cover 6 miles, Greece claims that its airspace is 10 miles. Ankara refuses this claim of Athens which is also controversial to international law.<sup>81</sup> The last but not least contentious issue between Turkey and Greece is conflicting claims over the small islets and rocks in the Aegean Sea. According to international law, islets and rocks that cannot sustain human habitation and have no economic life of their own shall have no exclusive economic zone or continental shelf.<sup>82</sup> Turkey refuses Greece's artificial settlements and its claims for ownership of these small islets and rocks.

## Is There a Way Forward for Cooperation in the Eastern Mediterranean?

Energy security, secure drilling and the free flow of gas necessitate dispute resolution. Energy sources can serve as a tool for settling disputes in the Aegean Sea and the Eastern Mediterranean if regional

80 *Casus belli* is an event or act used to justify a war. Hurriyet Daily News (30/08/2020). Turkey Says Greece's Decision to Extend its Territorial Waters in Aegean Sea is Cause of War, [www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkey-says-greeces-decision-to-extend-its-territorial-waters-in-aegean-is-cause-of-war-157805](http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkey-says-greeces-decision-to-extend-its-territorial-waters-in-aegean-is-cause-of-war-157805).

81 Air Space Related Problems, Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs, [www.mfa.gov.tr/air-space-related-related-problems.en.mfa](http://www.mfa.gov.tr/air-space-related-related-problems.en.mfa).

82 United Nations Convention on the Law of Sea, Part VIII, Article 121, Regime of Islands, [www.un.org/Depts/los/convention\\_agreements/texts/unclos/part8.htm](http://www.un.org/Depts/los/convention_agreements/texts/unclos/part8.htm).

and global actors give it a chance.<sup>83</sup> Disagreements between two NATO allies – Turkey and Greece – can be solved through dialogue, negotiations and equitable principles taking into account all special circumstances to achieve an equitable result. An inclusive and comprehensive approach is needed to solve disagreements in the Eastern Mediterranean. Without compromise and co-operation, the extraction and export of gas will be too costly, if not unfeasible. Coupled with low oil and gas prices due to the COVID-19 pandemic and low demand, the geopolitical precariousness of the region renders would-be investors wary of commitment. An inclusive, peaceful solution to cooperation might spill over effects beyond commercial benefit, bringing stability and peace to the Eastern Mediterranean for years to come. Here are some suggestions that might help to the way forward to cooperation in the region.

***Suggestion 1: An enhanced role given to NATO and the EU to ease tension and create a positive agenda might have a positive outcome on Turkey-Greece relations***

A NATO-led de-confliction mechanism was launched with the initiative of NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg. Thus, technical military talks between two NATO allies, Turkey and Greece, were held at NATO's headquarters in Brussels. This mechanism that created a hotline between two countries to facilitate de-confliction at sea or in the air has helped to reduce the risk of incidents and accidents in the Eastern Mediterranean.<sup>84</sup> NATO thus provided a platform to address differences between its two allies and paved the way for them to restart exploratory talks over their disagreements. NATO's efforts were coupled with another NATO ally Germany's

83 Aylin Ünver Noi (15/03/2018). Gas for Peace or War in the Eastern Mediterranean? Anadolu Agency, [www.aa.com.tr/en/analysis-news/analysis-gas-for-peace-or-war-in-eastern-mediterranean/1089967](http://www.aa.com.tr/en/analysis-news/analysis-gas-for-peace-or-war-in-eastern-mediterranean/1089967).

84 Military de-confliction Mechanism between Greece and Turkey Established at NATO, (1/10/2020). NATO, [www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news-178523.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news-178523.htm).

diplomatic efforts that have helped to ease tension between the two countries. NATO and Germany both found a way forward beyond complaining about concerns as Stoltenberg clearly explained.<sup>85</sup> This showed us that NATO can play a critical role in the normalisation of relations between its allies when allies disagree in the Eastern Mediterranean.<sup>86</sup> With this act, NATO did not only prevent a possible military confrontation that might destabilise the EU's security but also played a significant role in keeping its southern flank secure. In this context, NATO's role in the de-confliction mechanism is vital and should continue.

In addition to this, the EU's fair support for dialogue and negotiations between Turkey and Greece is as important as NATO's role in this respect. Constructive efforts by fair mediators can help further reduce tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean. One of the EU's key actors Germany's diplomatic efforts paved the way towards the decision of Turkey and Greece to restart exploratory talks that might help reduce tension between the two countries and ensure regional peace and stability which is in everyone's interest.

The December 2020 EU Council Decision underlines "the EU's strategic interest lies in the development of a cooperative and mutually beneficial relations with Turkey". Moreover, the EU Council Decision of December 2020 states that the offer of a positive EU-Turkey agenda remains on the table.<sup>87</sup> If this positive agenda can be activated between the EU and Turkey, it might have a positive reflection on Turkey-Greece relations as we witnessed during Turkey's democratic reform process in the 2000s on the way to EU membership including developing good neighbourly relations. Renewal of the EU-Turkey

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85 NATO Secretary General and Chancellor Merkel Discuss Current Security Challenges, 27 August 2020, NATO, [www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news\\_177622.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_177622.htm).

86 Opening Remarks by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg on NATO 2030, NATO, [www.nato.int/cps/fr/natohq/opinions\\_181208.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/fr/natohq/opinions_181208.htm).

87 European Council, 10-11 December 2020, [www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/european-council/2020/12/10-11](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/european-council/2020/12/10-11).

Refugee Deal of 2016 (18 March Statement), updating the Customs Union between Turkey and the EU and taking concrete steps towards the realisation of visa liberalisation for Turkey are among topics that can be part of creating this positive agenda between Turkey and the EU. In the past when Turkey and the EU had similar recriminations over challenging issues in 1995, they gave their relationship a new frame by agreeing to a Customs Union. The Customs Union between Turkey and the EU helped Turkey to move ahead with significant political reforms.<sup>88</sup> The activation of this positive agenda on topics that I suggested is more likely to contribute to the revival of the relationship between Turkey and the EU/ Turkey and Greece and contribute to a political and economic reform process in Turkey and proper implementation of these reforms.

***Suggestion 2: Ambassadors can play a constructive role in dispute resolution among the states in the Eastern Mediterranean***

Ambassadors can play a constructive role between states which have disagreements in the Eastern Mediterranean through shuttle diplomacy. Ambassadors can facilitate problem/conflict resolution through negotiations and dialogue. Impartiality of these actors is significant.

The former Acting US Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs Ambassador David Satterfield conducted shuttle diplomacy between Israel and Lebanon – two states which have a maritime boundary delimitation disagreement. Although Israel and Lebanon are technically at war, economic profit that seems attractive for both sides incentivised them to find common ground. Ambassador

88 Daniel S. Hamilton, *The North Atlantic Market Place* in Daniel S. Hamilton, Aylin Ünver Noi & Serdar Altay (eds.) *Turkey in the North Atlantic Marketplace*, Washington DC: Johns Hopkins University, Center for Transatlantic Relations, SAIS-CTR.

Satterfield, who was the prominent mediator between the two states, played an important role in facilitating negotiation.<sup>89</sup>

Ambassadors can play an active and important role in facilitating negotiation and dialogue between states in the Eastern Mediterranean. In this context, the appointment of ambassadors is important not only to keep channels of dialogue open but also to help further negotiations between states.

***Suggestion 3: Establishing a more inclusive and comprehensive regional forum inspired by the ECSC and EURATOM***

Europe as a continent that experienced many wars including two World Wars managed to build peace through cooperation initially on energy by establishing the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) and the European Atomic Energy Community (EURATOM). European leaders managed to expand their cooperation on these sectors to other fields, which paved the way for the establishment of the European Union – an outstanding example of regionalism that has led to long-lasting peace in Europe.<sup>90</sup>

This is actually not an impossible scenario for the Eastern Mediterranean. Energy security could be achieved through a cooperation inspired by the EU's regional integration initiatives ESCS and EURATOM. Increased cooperation and a multilateral forum with potential to prevent states in the region from competing and ignoring unresolved disputes over the EEZ could also provide peace dividends for the region as the ECSC and EURATOM did for Europe almost 70 years ago.<sup>91</sup> An inclusive and comprehensive forum

89 Mohammad Al-Kassim (June 9, 2019). Signs of a Breakthrough on Border Dispute Talks between Israel and Lebanon, Jerusalem Post, [www.jpost.com/arab-israeli-conflict/signs-of-a-breakthrough-on-border-dispute-talks-between-israel-and-lebanon-591947](http://www.jpost.com/arab-israeli-conflict/signs-of-a-breakthrough-on-border-dispute-talks-between-israel-and-lebanon-591947).

90 Aylin Ünver Noi (15/03/2018). Gas for Peace or War in the Eastern Mediterranean? Anadolu Agency, [www.aa.com.tr/en/analysis-news/analysis-gas-for-peace-or-war-in-eastern-mediterranean/1089967](http://www.aa.com.tr/en/analysis-news/analysis-gas-for-peace-or-war-in-eastern-mediterranean/1089967).

91 Ibid.

established between all states in the Eastern Mediterranean region might not only serve the energy security of states but also pave the way to cooperation in other sectors.<sup>92</sup> If we take into account that we are in an energy transition process from hydrocarbon resources to renewables, this cooperation on natural gas might contribute to future cooperation on renewable energy projects.

In this context, the EU and the US's role in developing both energy diplomacy and a policy based on the understanding that energy can serve as a tool for cooperation and security in the Eastern Mediterranean is significant. A cooperation on energy might spread to other fields and sectors between states in the region. Furthermore, it has the potential to facilitate ways to find a solution to other problems. This reminds us of the importance and necessity of inclusionary forums not exclusionary ones. This forum should include all states in the region.

#### **Suggestion 4: Inclusion of Turkey in EU-led initiatives, or those led by some EU countries, is vital for rebuilding ties between Turkey and the EU**

Allies are stronger when they are together than they are apart. Turkey's inclusion in EU-led initiatives and/or those led by some EU countries might help restore trust between some EU member states and Turkey. When Turkey was included in EC/EU-led initiatives and institutions in the past, it had a more aligned and coordinated foreign policy with the EU.

The Three Seas Initiative is a regional initiative launched by 12 EU member states located between the Baltic, the Adriatic and the Black Seas in 2015. The aim of this initiative is to contribute to enhanced EU unity and strengthen Transatlantic links through regional cooperation focusing on energy, digital and infrastructure interconnectivity.<sup>93</sup> The

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 92 Ibid.

93 Three Seas Initiative, [three-seas.eu/about](http://three-seas.eu/about).

Three Seas Initiative might be one of these initiatives that Turkey can become part of as a candidate country to the EU, a NATO member and with a coast on the Black Sea, it can contribute its objectives. Turkey's inclusion in more Western initiatives might not only contribute to the stability, peace and cooperation to be developed in these regions but also helps to restore trust eroded in recent years and might help to find common solutions to common problems.

## Conclusion

There is more need than ever for a constructive approach that will make gas drilling and transfer more feasible, commercially viable, less risky and more importantly beneficial for all countries in the region through inclusionary and peaceful solutions. To sum up, energy security necessitates dispute resolution.

We should remember that the energy system transitions to cleaner alternative energy systems will be accelerated by the new US government and its new industrial policy focus on more government investment in infrastructure and research in clean energy. The Biden administration's clean energy policy imposing environmental regulations that can make gas energy costly would make it harder for gas to compete with wind, solar and other renewable energies.<sup>94</sup> Biden's Executive Order on Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad issued on 27 January 2021 states that the US will develop a domestic action plan that will go hand in hand with global action under the US leadership. This climate action includes developing a plan to restrict fossil fuel financial flows in consultation with US agencies providing foreign assistance and development financing. As a part of the US climate finance plan, the US Secretary of State and Secretary

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94 Will Wade, Gerson Freitas Jr., and Jennifer A. Dlouhy, Biden's Green Energy Plan Seeks to End Natural Gas Use within 15 Years, WorldOil, [www.worldoil.com/news/2020/10/19/biden-s-green-energy-plan-seeks-to-end-natural-gas-use-within-15-years](http://www.worldoil.com/news/2020/10/19/biden-s-green-energy-plan-seeks-to-end-natural-gas-use-within-15-years).

of the Treasury have been tasked with promoting the flow of capital toward climate-aligned investments not to carbon investments.<sup>95</sup>

Like the US, the EU also has plans to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 55% in 2030 and achieve climate neutrality in 2050.<sup>96</sup> The cooperation starting on natural gas has the potential to spread to cooperation on renewables in the Eastern Mediterranean. Natural gas pipelines and LNG storage can be transformed to carry hydrogen (a climate friendly energy source) in the future.<sup>97</sup> Four suggestions were made in this article with the purpose of helping directly or indirectly to resolve disagreements, start cooperation without any delay and enable actors of the region to consider future cooperation on alternative (renewable) energy that can serve energy security of the Eastern Mediterranean.

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 95 Executive Order on Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad (27 January 2021) The White House, [www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/01/27/executive-order-on-tackling-the-climate-crisis-at-home-and-abroad](https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/01/27/executive-order-on-tackling-the-climate-crisis-at-home-and-abroad).

96 Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions Stepping Up Europe's 2030 Climate Ambition Investing in Climate-neutral Future for the Benefit of our people (17 September 2020), European Commission Brussels, [eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0562](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0562).

97 Hydrogene is an energy source that will partly replace natural gas in the future. There are feasibility studies to carry hydrogene through gas pipelines.

# The Role of Crisis Management in the European-Eastern Mediterranean Dialogue

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The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, which includes the Eastern Mediterranean, is of geostrategic relevance, due in part to the major maritime gateway of Suez and oil and gas resources nearby. After the bipolar structure in the world order collapsed, a power vacuum has appeared in MENA. Meanwhile, religious differences, ethnic conflicts and territorial disputes in the region that have been shaded by the bipolar structure have re-emerged. Crises in MENA have posed major challenges to European security. Recently, crises in the Eastern Mediterranean have become new unstable factors for the EU. In response to these crises, Europe deeply acknowledged the necessity of improving its crisis management capabilities and approaches in a changing geostrategic environment.

Crisis management in the Eastern Mediterranean is a new normal for Europe, not only refers to an urgent situation, but also targets for medium to long-term resolution. Multi-stakeholders are involved in the European-Eastern Mediterranean dialogue, with differentiated strategy orientation and policy preference, which adds more difficulties for Europe. The first section of this article outlines the connotation of crisis management, the second part explores the role of stakeholders, as well as the reasons for the escalating situation in the Eastern Mediterranean crisis, and the third section proposes the feasible approaches for European-Eastern Mediterranean dialogue.

## 1. Crisis Management

A crisis in international politics is a process of interaction occurring at higher levels of perceived intensity than the ordinary flow of events.<sup>98</sup> International crises are undoubtedly rooted in multiple reasons, including geopolitical, economic, ethical, religious and cultural factors. When the possibility of solving problems that the structure of the social system allows is lower than the limit necessary for the system to continue to survive, a crisis occurs. From the perspective of normative identity, when members of society realise that structural changes have affected their continued survival and believe that their social identity is threatened, a crisis arises. In other words, when the consensus basis of the normative structure is severely damaged and the society becomes anomie, the crisis will continue to exist. Crisis is often accompanied by instability and danger. The Eastern Mediterranean crisis is composed of three overlapping developments, the refugees from MENA, terrorism, energy, maritime boundary conflicts, security and military competition, and so on. Crises in international society are involved in the combination between great power competition and domestic political instability.

Crisis management is one comprehensive and multi-disciplinary concept, the immediate mobilisation of EU resources to deal with the consequences of external crises<sup>99</sup> and extend to the whole range of the activities. The aims for crisis management are more pluralistic, including alleviating the causes of crisis, conflict prevention and post-conflict stabilisation. Crisis management is a link in the process of Europe's security construction and foreign relations. And the approaches are more diversified, including bilateral and multilateral negotiations, diplomatic tools and sanctions, civilian and military crisis management missions. Europe's crisis management is more

98 Oran R.Young, *Politics of Force, Bargaining during Superpower Crisis*, Princeton University Press:1968, p.15.

99 European Union External Action Service, *Crisis response cycle*, 2015. Available at: [www.eeas.europa.eu/crisis-response/what-we-do/response-cycle/index.en.htm](http://www.eeas.europa.eu/crisis-response/what-we-do/response-cycle/index.en.htm).

proficient in post-crisis regional governance, with its economic, legal, social instruments and norms diffusion, thereby eliminating the potential risks and future conflicts. However, Europe's crisis management has drawbacks including scattered decision-making, low efficiency and differentiated priorities of EU members.

## 2. Multi-Players in the Eastern Mediterranean

MENA is the core strategic focus of Europe. However, Europe does not have a coherent and consistent strategy toward MENA. According to the EU Global Strategy, the EU stressed state and societal resilience to its East and South, via a credible accession process grounded in strict and fair conditionality.<sup>100</sup> However, the accession process has been suspended, not only because candidate countries could not meet requirements, but also EU members have different opinions on accession process. The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic is intertwined with existing economic, demographic, security and environmental challenges. The security situation of MENA, including the Eastern Mediterranean, is more likely to deteriorate rather than improve. For example, the struggle for resources will intensify; the weaker countries lose effective leverage for governance; the support of the major powers hit by the epidemic will decline. The increasing turbulence in MENA poses more challenges and risks to Europe than other major countries in the world. Meanwhile, many players share a goal of promoting regional stability in the Eastern Mediterranean, however, they adopt a differentiated approach.

Europe is not only a stakeholder but also part of a platform for dialogue. Turkey has been adopting an increasingly assertive foreign policy. As a key player in the region, Turkey can be either a game maker or spoiler. The relationship between Greece and Turkey is twisted with historical, cultural and geopolitical tensions. Cyprus is

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<sup>100</sup> EU, Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe, A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign And Security Policy, June 2016.

also affected by Turkey's confrontational foreign policy. Therefore, the EU inevitably becomes the stakeholder for the conflict, including its other members. However, EU crisis decision-making is regarded as a multi-level norm game<sup>101</sup> and EU member states adopt different ways. The EU is not a coherent global actor, which means it is difficult to adopt a unified approach towards Turkey. For instance, France supports Greece and advocates a confrontational approach, which is mainly based on its preferences for Europe's strategic autonomy. Meanwhile, Germany might act as a mediating role. Italy seeks a more balanced way towards Turkey, considering Italy and Turkey have compatible interests in Libya. Spain has more experience from dealing with the Western Mediterranean crisis.<sup>102</sup> In general, the relationship between Europe and Turkey is at a stalemate.

The security and strategic interests and goals of Europe and Turkey are intertwined, which makes it difficult to make concessions and reach compromises. This is the fundamental reason for the outbreak of the Eastern Mediterranean crisis and its evolution along the escalation route. *Firstly*, the political mistrust between these two parties has continued unabated. Moreover, other stakeholders have differences in interests, policy orientations, let alone lacking the basic trust. It is inevitable that the attempts to solve the Eastern Mediterranean issue fail repeatedly. *Secondly*, during crisis management and following diplomatic negotiations, it is easier to establish principles for cooperation and reach initial agreements, but it is difficult to implement the agreements. *Thirdly*, the dynamics of conflicts among individual countries have changed, which merged with changes in geopolitics. For instance, Russia has gained influence in the Mediterranean region, with intense interaction with Turkey, while the US

101 Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink, *International Norm Dynamics and Political Change*, *International Organization*, Vol.52, No. 4, 1998, pp.887-917.

102 Niklas Bremberg, *Diplomacy and Security Community-Building, EU crisis management in the Western Mediterranean*, Routledge, 2016.

has been withdrawing from MENA and has continued to pivot to the Indo-Pacific area.

NATO lacks an overall strategy for the MENA region, because NATO's strategy gravity is the eastern border of Europe (that is, Russia). Since 2014, NATO has been fighting against the Islamic State to demonstrate its contribution to combatting terrorism. At the Brussels Summit (July 2018), NATO endorsed a Package on the South,<sup>103</sup> which includes a series of cooperation measures aimed at adopting a more strategic, concentrated and coordinated approach to MENA. It is difficult for Europe to continue to rely on the security guarantees of the United States and NATO. The development of a crisis management mechanism which is independent from NATO has become a top priority for European security.

It cannot go beyond the internal and external environment of the alliance and act on its own behalf. Its goals, mechanisms, capabilities and actual operations are all affected by the international system and internal dynamics. Meanwhile, no matter how realist international political theory argues that the pursuit of realistic interests is the "root" of state behaviour, it should not and cannot completely exclude the driving forces such as ideas, emotions and other normative factors on state behaviour, especially the behaviour of major powers. Historical experiences can also be one of the driving forces that influence state behaviour.

### **3. Improvement for Europe's Crisis Management in the European-Eastern Mediterranean Dialogue**

Europe has regarded the Mediterranean as its border, especially after the wars in Libya and Syria. When it comes to how to deal

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 103 Brussels Summit Declaration, Issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Brussels 11-12 July 2018, [www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_156624.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_156624.htm)

with this region, countries have been taking different approaches. Some believe that military contact is necessary because the MENA region is crucial for Europe's security, others stress that economic development and political reform might be the fundamental way to alleviate risks. However, both approaches have ended in deadlock or have proven to be counterproductive – the MENA region is still in turmoil, even exerted spillover effects for this region and the European continent. The Eastern Mediterranean crisis added new impetus for instability in this region. How could the EU deal with the Eastern Mediterranean crisis?

### ***Update Perception of Crisis***

The EU needs to change its perception of crisis. Firstly, Europe cannot manage and resolve crises by military means alone. Secondly, the EU should avoid treating crisis management as a tool for exporting its economic and political systems. However, Europe could view crisis management as an opportunity to improve its surrounding security environment and advance integration in surrounding region. Thirdly, the fact that crisis management demands a relatively centralised power and a more efficient decision-making process has posed a challenge to sovereignty and sectoral interests, which often puts the EU in a dilemma of choosing different values and principles.

### ***Adherence to Multilateralism***

The EU itself builds on multilateral cooperation, it must adhere to the principles of multilateral consultation, transparency and fairness when it comes to international crisis management in the Eastern Mediterranean. It maintains equal rights of information and participation of all member states. Europe's crisis management model is characterised by its internal openness and collective participation channels. Highly developed public opinion has also greatly increased the domestic audience costs of decision-makers. In this sense, the East Med Gas Forum brings European countries together with Israel

and Arab countries, including Italy, Greece, Cyprus, Egypt, Palestine, Jordan, Israel, while Ankara is left out.<sup>104</sup> It is not an inclusive multi-lateral platform for dialogue.

### ***Cultivating Efficiency-Oriented Cooperation Culture***

The efficiency-oriented cooperation culture is the direction of Europe's efforts to improve its crisis management, which is to guarantee relative concentration of decision-making powers. However, it does not mean that it will simply return to a nation state power model. Considering that the EU has a serious shortage of military resources and lacks military support capabilities to deal with crises, Europe will have to expand its range of means to deal with the crisis, for instance, it is essential that the EU implements the 'comprehensive approach to conflicts and crises' through a coherent use of all policies at the EU's disposal. However, the most important is that the EU members should comply with EU-level crisis management decisions. The "Strategic Compass" will act based on a broad political consensus and a strong political will,<sup>105</sup> which contribute to identify and reassess those threats and challenges in the Eastern Mediterranean.

### ***Inviting More Global Powers***

In order to achieve long-term stability and prosperity in the Eastern Mediterranean, a mechanism based on five permanent members of the UN Security Council might complement EU or NATO leadership, considering that the UN played a more prominent role in border disputes. On the one hand, the EU as a global actor, from civilian power Europe, to normative power Europe, to transformative power Europe, is confronted with the influence of other global powers. On the other hand, Russia, China and other major powers or middle

104 EastMed Gas Forum fuels energy diplomacy in troubled region, DW, October 8, 2020, [www.dw.com/en/eastmed-gas-forum-fuels-energy-diplomacy-in-troubled-region/a-55206641](http://www.dw.com/en/eastmed-gas-forum-fuels-energy-diplomacy-in-troubled-region/a-55206641)

105 Strategic Compass: Developing strategic principles, August 25, 2020, [www.eu2020.de/eu2020-en/news/article/eu-defense-strategic-compass-foreign-policy/2377030](http://www.eu2020.de/eu2020-en/news/article/eu-defense-strategic-compass-foreign-policy/2377030)

powers have substantial interests in the Eastern Mediterranean and even exert significant influences. Therefore, based on diversified demands from countries in this region, it might cultivate a new order for regional public goods supply, including adopting differentiated approaches, coordinating the supply of multi-level public goods and strengthening sub-regional platform. Besides, Europe will not withdraw its military power from MENA and will continue to adopt the integrated approach towards the Eastern Mediterranean.

1<sup>st</sup> edition 2021

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With the support of  
the Erasmus+ Programme

This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.