

NEW EURO-MEDITERRANEAN DYNAMICS IN THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN

Athens, 10 November 2017

report
from the Dialogue Workshop



REPORT No. 20
November 2017
www.euromesco.net

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Dialogue Workshop “New Euro-Mediterranean Dynamics in the Eastern Mediterranean” was held on November 10th 2017 in Athens as part of the EuroMeSCo Network’s ENI Project, co-funded by the EU and the IEMed. It was organized by Mitvim – The Israeli Institute for Regional Foreign Policies and EuroMeSCo, in cooperation with ELIAMEP. The workshop was hosted by the Representation of the European Commission in Greece.

A total of 25 participants, including the EuroMeSCo researchers involved in the project, as well as additional experts and scholars attended the workshop, which aimed at presenting and discussing the initial research results of the Joint Policy Study. Participants analyzed various factors that may constitute both



opportunities and threats to an increasing cooperation between some Eastern Mediterranean countries, such as newfound energy reserves and the war in Syria.

In the first session, Dr. Thanos Dokos and Prof. Panagiotis Tsakonas from ELIAMEP (Greece) kicked off the discussion on whether the Eastern Mediterranean constitutes a separate sub-regional security system and on ways to promote collective security schemes in the region. During the second session, Dr. Ehud Eiran of Mitvim (Israel) analyzed the energy and regional integration in the Eastern Mediterranean while in the third session, Dr. Muriel Asseburg of SWP (Germany) examined the Eastern Mediterranean dynamics and the evolving war in Syria. In the final session, Dr. Dahlia Scheindlin of Mitvim (Israel), Walid Salem of CDCD (Palestine) and Prof. Ahmet Sözen of the Eastern Mediterranean University (northern Cyprus) debated over conflict resolution methods and approaches in the Eastern Mediterranean, and over the benefits of conflicts comparisons and mutual conflict resolution support.

DETAILS OF THE FOUR SESSIONS

The Eastern Mediterranean as a Sub-Region with Collective Security Schemes

Dr. Thanos Dokos and Prof. Panagiotis Tsakonas highlighted the low degree of regional integration that characterizes the Eastern Mediterranean and they also briefly referred to the reasons the region remains largely absent from the more general trend of intensification of regionalism, which seems to be taking place in many regions across the globe over the past two decades.

After providing a geographical definition of the region and presenting the evolution of the Eastern Mediterranean physiognomy in terms of both structure and process, they argued that the conceptual tool of “security sub-system”/“security complex” is a useful methodological tool that allows the Eastern Mediterranean to be viewed as a distinct “new/separate” region and as an autonomous geopolitical entity with specific needs, characteristics and

interests. They proposed the establishment of a “limited security regime”, which will constitute a tacit security arrangement on three particular issues upon which the interests of the states are expected to converge, namely energy security, Islamist radicalization and terrorism, and the proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction. Migration was not included in this short list as it is not perceived as a regional problem (only Greece, Turkey, Italy, and to a smaller extent Malta are being affected). The establishment of a “limited security regime” was presented as a pragmatic first step to be taken on behalf of the states of the region for building a forum of coordination of their action so as to effectively address common concerns and interests.

The strategic cooperation processes between Greece, Cyprus, Israel and Egypt, with the envisaged participation of Jordan and other interested regional countries were mentioned as success stories in the context of regional security cooperation in the Eastern Mediterranean. It was also mentioned that the aforementioned cooperation schemes should remain inclusive, not exclusive. Finally, the need for a regional security forum, formal or quasi-formal, Track-I, or Track 1½ diplomacy (of the Shangri-La Dialogue type) for the Mediterranean was emphasized.

Feedback from other researchers and stakeholders

Most of the attendants found the idea of establishing a collective security scheme in the Eastern Mediterranean region interesting, but at the same time difficult to implement. Also, some participants emphasized that the disagreement may appear in efforts towards a common definition of the terms: Islamist radicalization and jihadist terrorism, which might not be acceptable in certain Muslim countries of the region. On the other hand, it was proposed that a possible Eastern Mediterranean security cooperation regime (of any type, formal or informal, limited or comprehensive) should be expanded – both geographically and politically - so as to involve as many participants as possible, i.e. particular reference was made to the inclusion of Turkey, as a key regional state that has potential to contribute to the stabilization of fragile countries/entities, such as Gaza and/or Lebanon. The need to include the

Palestinians and take into account the need to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was also mentioned. Other remarks referred to the coherence of the proposed security cooperation regime, and the willingness, or lack thereof, of the countries of the region to participate in such an ambitious initiative. Particular references were also made to inherent difficulties any attempt by the weak local actors to form and join a limited security regime may entail, as well as to the role certain external actors are called upon to play for the formation of such a regime in the Eastern Mediterranean region.

Energy and Regional Integration in the Eastern Mediterranean

Dr. Ehud Eiran presented a review of the potential economic and strategic opportunities that energy developments could potentially bring to the region. During his presentation he attempted to measure the impact of new offshore natural gas fields in the Eastern Mediterranean and to analyze whether energy can promote regional integration, particularly as it applies to Eastern Mediterranean's relationship with Europe. Also, Dr. Eiran assessed the risks and opportunities that these energy discoveries have created in the fields of regional security, national infrastructure, international borders, environmental and crisis management, and relations with Europe. In his conclusion, he summarized Eastern Mediterranean energy politics in the last eight years, and explored possible future scenarios that may come into fruition as a direct result of the discovery of additional offshore natural gas deposits.

Feedback from other researchers and stakeholders

There were positive comments regarding the presentation for its consistency and the extensive and detailed data it provided. One of the issues raised was the impact of energy dependence on international relations and especially the Israel-Palestine peace negotiations. There was also a discussion over energy exports and state cooperation, as well as the issue of the exploitation of gas prices and the overall tax and price policy in the area. Other issues raised and discussed included the construction of gas pipelines in the Eastern Mediterranean region, their possible effect (both positive and negative) on the environment, economy and inter-state affairs, the range and depth of the

benefits of the natural gas reservoirs for the region, and the market dynamics over the immense investments in the infrastructure construction sector. Finally, the prospects for renewable energy resources and the interconnection of the energy power grid systems as a mean of collaboration and cooperation were also debated. Overall, there was agreement that although energy discoveries could in principle act as a catalyst, not enough gas has been discovered for energy to become a geo-political game changer.

Eastern Mediterranean Dynamics regarding the Evolving War in Syria

Dr. Muriel Asseburg commenced her presentation with an analysis of how conflict dynamics in Syria have been developing, followed by a closer look at the specific interests of the Eastern Mediterranean actors most involved in and affected by the conflict there. She presented how these interests converge or diverge with other involved actors' interests, and discussed the actual and potential repercussions of the conflict on each one of them. The presentation analyzed sub-regional dynamics and attempted to identify common agendas, converging practices and/or possibilities for collective and coordinated Eastern Mediterranean action in the fields of humanitarian aid, refugee management, future stabilization, transition, and post-conflict reconstruction processes in Syria. Dr. Asseburg highlighted the lack of common objectives and shared priorities between main players in the region. There seems to be only minimal convergence of interests between some actors, for example, between Israel and Jordan regarding Iran's future role in Syria.

Feedback from other researchers and stakeholders

Questions were raised about the exact definition of the terms "stabilization" and "state-building process". Among the other issues debated were the return of refugees to their countries and the further normalization of life in the war-affected regions. The need to significantly reduce the Jihadist threat was emphasized. Another topic that was debated was the role of PKK in the aftermath of the conflict, as some Turkish participants mentioned the designation of the PKK as a terrorist group. Also, part of the discussion revolved around the EU assistance program for the increased immigrant flows in Turkey, and the European role in

the Syrian conflict as a guarantor of a credible democratic regime change. Some participants questioned the usefulness of aspiring for a new social contract in the context of a fresh start for the Syrian state. Turkey's involvement in the Syrian crisis and the legitimate interests of Turkey in the area, as presented by the current Turkish government, were also discussed. Finally, it was suggested that promoting a leadership training program for the new generation of leaders in Syria, focusing on technocratic knowledge and democratic ideas, might be a useful contribution to the country's long and difficult reconstruction process.

Conflict Resolution

The topic of Conflict Resolution in the Eastern Mediterranean was discussed on the basis of opening interventions by three speakers, Dr. Dahlia Scheindlin of Mitvim (Israel), Walid Salem of CDCD (Palestine) and Prof. Ahmet Sözen of the Eastern Mediterranean University (northern Cyprus), instead of a single prepared draft chapter. Starting the discussion, Dahlia Scheindlin introduced policy lessons from a comprehensive research project she carried out that compared different conflicts, among them the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the Cyprus conflict. She highlighted the benefits that can be gained from conflict comparisons and the need to effectively use incentives and disincentives as part of conflict resolution processes. Walid Salem discussed the idea of an Eastern Mediterranean security coalition with reference to social-historical foundations and to the need for inclusivity. He emphasized that conflict resolution proposals should originate in the region itself and not be dictated by external actors. He concluded by emphasizing the importance of taking into account both the international and domestic points of view when working to resolve conflicts. The session was completed by the intervention of Prof. Ahmet Sözen who emphasized the role of education in conflict resolution processes, and the need of actors in the Eastern Mediterranean be better informed about other conflicts in the sub-region. He highlighted the multi-level and complicated challenges of negotiation processes, giving the example of the negotiations in Cyprus throughout the last 20 years.

Feedback from other researchers and stakeholders

In this last session, some participants raised again the general issue of the definition of Eastern Mediterranean as a separate region, and debated the status of “frozen conflicts” and ways to promote breakthroughs towards meaningful peace negotiations. Similarities between Cyprus and Israel were discussed (‘we are doing relatively OK, why should we compromise?’), as well as the complexities of protracted conflicts, including generational gaps, the lack of a sense of urgency to resolve the conflict, and greater resistance to compromise. Other issues raised during the discussion included the weakening of the EU and the reduced impact of its soft power, the impact of globalization, the role played by non-state actors (Arabs in Israel, Kurds in various countries of the region, Hamas, Hezbollah, etc.), and the need to provide incentives for external players to participate in stabilization and conflict resolution efforts. It was also suggested that it is important for peace negotiators to identify and address sectarian interests. Finally, it was debated whether pointing out the negative consequences of non-resolved conflicts can persuade the involved parties of a conflict to move forward toward a conflict resolution process. It was agreed the resolution of the Cyprus and Israeli-Palestinian conflict would pave the way for a new era of cooperation in the Eastern Mediterranean.



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