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East Med security: Cyprus and France strengthen defense cooperation.

On April 3, 2017, the Republic of Cyprus (RoC) and France have updated and enhanced the defense cooperation agreement signed in 2007, on the sidelines of the visit of Nicosia's defense minister Christophoros Fokaides in Paris.

The agreement signed in 2007 encompassed bilateral cooperation on military training, joint maneuvers and information training. It allowed France to use the Cypriot air base near Paphos (built by Greece and dedicated to Andreas Papandreou) and maximized the development of capabilities for SAR missions (search and rescue).

The updated deal extends the areas of mutual aid to new topics of shared concern in the Mediterranean, such as energy and maritime security, terrorism, anti-piracy prevention, early warning and crisis management.

Since the outcome of the Cypriot reunification talks is still open, RoC aims to consolidate bilateral ties with traditional allies in order to better cope with the current status quo vis-à-vis the "Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus" (TRNC) and Turkey if the 'continuity scenario' will prevail. In 2007, Turkey had already condemned the French-Cypriot defense agreement, denouncing the RoC's violation of the Treaty of Guarantee among Greece, Turkey, UK and the RoC.

On the other hand, France looks for strengthened regional alliances for two main reasons: the protection of French interests and leverage in the Arab Levant (which includes now the fight against transnational jihadism), plus the prospects of gas discoveries and exploitation in the Mediterranean Basin. France's Total is going to carry out drills for off shore gas in RoC's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).

In 2015, the United Kingdom allowed France to use its air base in Akrotiri to strike against the so-called Caliphate, after the IS-claimed attacks in Paris (November 2015). The anti-Daesh Global Coalition used also RoC's sovereign air base near Paphos to carry out attacks against jihadi fiefdoms between Syria and Iraq; France uses the same air base for support operations against Daesh.

The strengthening and the widening of the defense agreement between the Republic of Cyprus and France confirms how much the divided isle has become pivotal for the stability of the whole Mediterranean. Nowadays, 'crowded' East Med's waters mirror more and more the current international system based on multipolarity: given its geographic positioning, Cyprus is the crossroads of competing regional and sub-regional interests. In such a framework, the upgrading of France-Cyprus defense agreement is a further step for Eastern Mediterranean's stability.

Eleonora Ardemagni - *Analyst of the Middle East, focused on foreign policy and security issues of Yemen and the GCC region. External researcher (Mediterranean and Middle East Program) at the Italian Institute for International Political Studies and regular contributor for the Aspen Institute Italy*