



NATO Foundation
Defense College

Levant & Eastern Med March 2017

Economic Diplomacy: Athens' outreach in the Gulf

Since Greece is struggling to recover from a long-standing financial and social crisis, Athens' foreign policy is mainly driven by economic diplomacy intents. In the last decade, relationships between Greece and the Gulf states were already marked by economic subjects, beyond traditional matters as oil supply and diplomatic support vis-à-vis Turkey on the Cyprus issue.

In recent months, Athens' contacts and visits in the Gulf monarchies have intensified. As usual, the United Arab Emirates and Qatar stand at the top of Greece's outreach efforts on the Arabian shore of the Gulf (see the Hellenic Business Council in Dubai, founded in 2010). However, even relations with Saudi Arabia seem to have entered a new start.

There's might be room for mutual cooperation. Greece is seeking for foreign investments, with the purpose to succeed the privatization program agreed with international creditors, while Gulf states are in the middle of engaging processes of post-oil economic diversification. Athens can offer not only security-centred expertise (as military training), but also technical know-how regarding 'to the point' projects (for instance, in the field of constructions and defense-naval industry).

Greek and Emirati ministers of Economy met in Athens to discuss UAE's possible investments in tourism, infrastructure, energy, agriculture, logistics and innovation (October 2016). The meeting followed the visit of the Emirati minister of foreign affairs and international cooperation in Athens (July 2016), when he was received by Greek PM Alexis Tsipras at Maximos Mansion to discuss the enhancement of bilateral ties. On November 2016, Greece and the UAE signed a programme of military cooperation in the fields of operational and individual training for 2017. On December 2016, on the occasion of the UNESCO conference in Abu Dhabi, Tsipras met with Shaykh Mohammed bin Zayed al-Nahyan, the UAE crown prince and deputy supreme commander of the armed forces. Last February, Greece and the UAE convened the third joint inter-ministerial committee.

Greek coalition junior partner and Defence minister, Panos Kammenos, visited Qatar on January 2017 to discuss cooperation in the field of military training and defense industry.

On March 2017, Greek President Prokopis Pavlopoulos visited Saudi Arabia and met with king Salman: the delegation encompassed eleven ministers and top businessmen. For the first time since 1999, the joint ministerial committee was convened. In addition, two agreements were signed, on technological and scientific cooperation (Pavlopoulos visited the King Abdulaziz City for Science and Technology, KACST), and on satellite technology.

Looking at the Gulf region, export and tourism represent Greece's remarkable assets to develop political ties through economic diplomacy. Athens' Parliament has just passed a tourism bill aimed to

ratify a specific agreement signed in 2014 with Kuwait. In 2016, the number of Gulf tourists who decided to spend their holidays in Greece raised of 55% with respect to the previous year.

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*