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Eastern Mediterranean: building networks of multidimensional cooperation.

In the Eastern Mediterranean, intra-regional cooperation attempts grow in number and level, following multidimensional, often intersected and spill-over dimensions.

On April 4, 2017, Greece, Cyprus, Israel and Italy signed in Tel Aviv a preliminary agreement for the construction of the “East Med” pipeline, a project aimed to exploit the off shore gas resources discovered in the Levant Basin.

On May 22-23, 2017, the second Rhodes Conference for Security and Stability was held in the Greek island: the Conference gathered a forum promoted by Greece’s Foreign Minister Nikos Kotzias.

The “East Med” pipeline was designated by the European Commission as a Project of Common Interest (PCI) in 2015, even though the feasibility study is expected only at the end of 2017. According to the project, the pipeline would carry Israeli and Cypriot gas in Europe, passing through Greece (via Crete) and Italy. Notwithstanding limited resources so far, “East Med” would reduce European Union's dependency from Russian and Algerian gas imports, as well as it would not transit through Turkey.

The Rhodes Conference was attended by foreign ministers or senior diplomats coming from Southern Europe, the Middle East and the Balkans: Greece, Cyprus, Italy, Bulgaria, Romania, Albania, Slovakia, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Egypt, Algeria, Libya, Tunisia and Lebanon were among the countries represented. The forum aims to decrypt common challenges in order to build a shared agenda for cooperation: a new security architecture for the Eastern Mediterranean might be the final goal.

The Eastern Mediterranean mirrors shifting balances of power at international level: the United States’ influence in the Mediterranean sub-region is waning, while Russia and China’s ones are increasing.

What’s interesting is that as long as the external penetration raises, intra-regional networks for cooperation surge too, attempting to build multilateral frameworks devoted to specific issues. From a systemic point of view, the Eastern Mediterranean has become multipolar (Russia, China, US), paving the way for zero-sum rivalries so far. But from an intra-regional level (Greece, Cyprus, Israel, Egypt, Jordan), multilateralism has been emerging as the recurrent way to address topics of mutual interest and concern.

This trend could be translated into increased sub-regional cooperation, as it could not.

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