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Cyprus-Gulf monarchies intensify cooperation: seeds of a strategic partnership

The Republic of Cyprus (RoC) and the Gulf monarchies are likely to increment ties and cooperation in the medium-long term: this is suggested by many indicators.

Qatar, Kuwait, Oman, the UAE and Jordan have resident embassies in Nicosia (UAE and Jordan have opened in 2016), while Saudi Arabia's Resident Ambassador in Greece sent letters of credence from Athens to the president of the Republic of Cyprus in 2015. About Bahrain, a Cairo-Resident Bahraini Ambassador to Cyprus presented his credentials in 2015.

Economic investments, trade, tourism, renewable energies (solar, wind, geothermic) and natural gas discoveries are current fields of cooperation to deepen, as underlined during Emirati Foreign Affairs Minister Shaykh Abdullah bin Zayed al-Nahyan's visit to Nicosia on July 2016, when also occurred official talks between delegations.

The rising significance of economic and financial linkages (see for instance the Jordanian-Cypriot Business Forum held in the kingdom on November 2015) is only one side of the coin, since regional security has a central, foundational role in Cyprus-Gulf monarchies relations.

As a matter of fact, the isle of Cyprus is European for culture, but Middle Eastern with regard to the geostrategic location. Gulf monarchies already recognize to Nicosia a pro-Gulf role in the European Union, which often helps to convey "the voice of the Arab Gulf capitals" at Bruxelles.

Regional security was the core of King of Jordan's recent visit in Nicosia. As already emphasized by both countries during the "Aqaba meetings", which brought together heads of state and officials, the fight against international terrorism will require expanded cooperation between Jordan and the RoC.

On September 2016, the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Cyprus, the UAE and Jordan (plus other countries from the Mediterranean and the Balkans) joined the Rhodes Conference for Security and Stability, organized by the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Maritime security, violent extremism,

migrations crisis, climate challenges and religious plurality were some of the security-related themes on the agenda. On January 2016, Brussels hosted the first Cyprus-Greece-Jordan Trilateral Meeting.

From a geopolitical perspective, Cyprus is a maritime vanguard of security for the Arabian Peninsula, in the middle of the fundamental waterway between the Mediterranean and the Red Sea, not far from the troubled Syrian coasts. Now that the Huthis, the Yemeni Zaydi Shia rebels supported by Teheran, still seize the majority of the Yemeni Red Sea coasts next to the Bab-el-Mandeb strait (as the city of Hodeida, al-Mokha and Ibb), the Cypriot route acquires new interest, taking into account that Hormuz is definitely an Iranian-controlled choke-point.

Cyprus-Gulf monarchies relations might turn into a strategic partnership: since the last couple of years, Cyprus-Gulf monarchies bilateral consultations and multilateral initiatives have been intensifying and in the second half of 2015 Cypriot President Nicos Anastasiades paid official visits at several Gulf monarchies.

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