



## EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN April 2018

### **The Rise of Piraeus: Infrastructural and Geopolitical Implications**

The port of Piraeus strengthens its rank position in Europe, paving the way for infrastructural and geopolitical implications. In 2016, the throughput of the Athenian port reached 3,67 million Twenty-Foot Equivalent Units (TEUs): according to estimations, Piraeus will achieve 5 million TEUs by 2018 and 7,2 million TEUs by 2022. After the first investment in 2008, China's COSCO acquired in 2016 the 51% of the shares of the Piraeus Port Authority.

Athens' port climbed to the seventh spot among Europe's ports and third in the Mediterranean [Ilias Bellos, "Piraeus climbs in European port ranking", *Kathimerini*, 5 March 2018]: this is a positive trend with respect to European ports.

From an infrastructural perspective, the development of the Piraeus port, coupled with foreign investments in the Thessaloniki port (a sale to a consortium of German, French and Russian-Greek companies) and the coming privatization of Greek smaller ports designs a new maritime geography for trade and logistics in the Mediterranean.

As part of the bailout programme, the Greek government privatises also ten small ports, located especially in the islands: Volos, Rafina, Igoumenitsa, Patra, Alexandroupolis, Heraklion, Elefsina, Lavrion, Corfu and Kavala [*Export.gov*, "Greece-Shipping and Maritime Services", 7 December 2017]. Among them, the port of Heraklion in Crete stands in a strategic part of the Mediterranean, on the maritime route for Libya and Egypt. The present location of Heraklion, is better known in history as Kandax or Candia, was a crucial Arab, Byzantine, Ottoman port since 820 A.D.

From a geopolitical point of view, the rise of Piraeus' role emphasizes the centrality of the Eastern Mediterranean in regional as well as in international dynamics. East Med waters have always been decisive for global balances, but recent developments (such as the Syrian crisis, Libyan instability, Russia's assertive foreign and naval policy, jihadism migrations), together with Asian powers' ascendance and

consolidation in international economy, shed a renewed light of interest on the Eastern Mediterranean rim, as in the case of Greek ports and maritime infrastructures.

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