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Turkey and the Others: Eastern Mediterranean's Crystallized Balances

Several factors shed light on Eastern Mediterranean's crystallized balances, contributing to shape a state of persistent polarization. As a result, the relationship between Greece, Cyprus and Israel grows while Turkey, on the contrary, appears even more isolated in the subregion.

Firstly, Turkey's snap presidential and parliamentary elections will be held the 24th of June. Looking for re-election, Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan aims to rally the nationalist sentiment: thus, this is not the time for Ankara to de-escalate tensions with neighbours (Greece), for military restraint (Syria) or for negotiation talks (Cyprus issue).

Secondly, Turkey and Israel had a harsh verbal exchange with regard to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, because of recurrent violence in Gaza. "Looking back, maybe the accord should not have been approved", Erdoğan said referring to the 2016 reconciliation agreement with Israel [*Xinhua*, "Israel, Turkey in war of words over violence in Gaza", 2 April 2018]. Such an event is going to protract strained relations between Ankara and Tel Aviv, thus further weakening – in the medium term - prospects of cooperation on energy matters.

Thirdly, Greece, Cyprus and Israel held a new trilateral summit in Nicosia the 8th of May, thus marking another political step towards subregional security cooperation and the "East Med" gas project. The three countries are willing to sign an agreement within the year to push the pipeline project forward. Athens, Nicosia and Tel Aviv reaffirmed also their support for a planned undersea electricity and fibre optic cables to connect the three countries [*Times of Israel*, "Israel, Cyprus and Greece push East Med pipeline to Europe", 8 May 2018]. With regard to "East Med", the technical feasibility is currently under study.

Fourthly, liquefied natural gas (LNG) export from Egypt may start by the end of 2018: it will mainly consist of surplus gas produced in Egypt. However, companies have been discussing about the possibility to buy Israeli and Cypriot gas, for liquefaction in Egypt and then export [Kostis Geropoulos, "Israel, Cyprus, Greece Will Push EU Gas Line at May Summit", *The National Herald*, 10 April 2018]. In the last

years Cairo's president Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi strongly aligned with his Greek, Cypriot and Israeli counterparts in the Eastern Mediterranean, while relations between Egypt and Turkey are still tense due to the Muslim Brotherhood's issue (although Egyptian exports to Turkey registered an increase in 2017).

Fifthly, Cyprus remains a divided island. The forthcoming Turkish presidential elections are going to hamper more and more the diplomatic steps between the Greek Cypriot and the Turkish Cypriot communities till June 24, as well as among the guarantors (Greece, Turkey and the UK). Whatever inter-Cypriot initiative is bound to fail if external backers are not supportive or politically engaged.

For these five reasons, political dynamics in the Eastern Mediterranean are crystallized, while the security environment of this sub-region is decisive in Middle Eastern, European and inter-regional balances.

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