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**France – India – Greece Security Cooperation:
Consequences for the East Mediterranean Gas Forum**

Pauline Mortel

(Researcher, 2021 RIEAS Internship Program)

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Abstract

This research paper will detail the security cooperation and close partnerships that have been developed by France, India and Greece with one another, and which have encompassed, among others, joint military exercises and arms deals. Beyond the military and economic benefits that they have brought to Paris, New Delhi and Ankara, these alliances have also enabled these three countries to develop their power and therefore intervene militarily in their region, in particular in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Indo-Pacific. It also brought them the possibility to cope in the former region with rising threats - including the Turkish offensive behaviour - and key issues - among which disputed waters and natural gas reserves in their Exclusive Economic Zones. Following the emergence of the East Mediterranean Gas Forum in 2020, the outcomes of these security relationships on this new forum that promotes regional dialogue on energy affairs appear numerous. They range from debates on the enforcement of peace objectives by Eastern Mediterranean countries in the middle of deep tensions in the region, to the potential role that may be played by the EU and NATO in the East Med Gas Forum, which will be explored in depth in this paper.

Key Words: Security; Strategic Partnership; Eastern Mediterranean; Energy Affairs; Regional Cooperation; France-India-Greece Relationships; East Med Gas Forum; Turkey; Geopolitical Tensions.

Introduction

“The situation in the Eastern Mediterranean is worrying. Turkey’s unilateral decisions on oil exploration are causing tensions. These tensions must end in order to allow for a peaceful dialogue between neighbouring countries and allies within NATO. [...] I have decided to temporarily strengthen the French military presence in the Eastern Mediterranean in the coming days, in cooperation with European partners including Greece.” (Macron, 2021)¹. This tweet emanating from the French President Emmanuel Macron and posted on August 12th, 2020, outlined the military standoff at stake in the Eastern Mediterranean around energy issues. In the meantime, it emphasized the security cooperation between France and Greece in the region, which led Macron to deploy, among others, French Air Force Rafale fighters and frigates, in order to defend French and Greek common interests vis-à-vis Turkey and its offensive behaviour towards members of the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF) in the zone.

This decision of the French President is not surprising, providing that France and Greece are historical allies in the military domain, having developed close security cooperation from the 19th century onwards, and continuing up to date to share common values and objectives in the Eastern Mediterranean, including the opposition to Turkish ambitions in the region. While the security of the Eastern Mediterranean region is indeed of the utmost importance for Greece given its strategic geographic position, it also matters for France, which constantly increases its presence in the region due to its energy stakes and its commitment to encourage regional development (Ellis, 2018). More recently, the military cooperation that is being developed since 2020 between Athens and New Delhi demonstrates the security worries at stake for both countries in the Eastern Mediterranean too, in particular vis-à-vis the Turkish-Pakistani developing friendship which is being especially worrying for India beyond its borders. After the two countries acknowledged their common interests in reinforcing their cooperation on security issues, they declared their willingness to “strengthening Greek and Indian relations and [assessing] developments in Eastern Mediterranean & South Asia”, as was emphasized by the Greek Foreign Minister Nikos Dendias in a tweet dating back to October 29th, 2020. In the meantime, India and France have been allying on security stakes since the middle of the 18th century, providing that the latter also has strategic interests and a large population of more than 1.5 million citizens living in the Indo-Pacific region (Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, 2021). Given their current shared interests in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea, their alignment might be extended to the region as well and could therefore contribute to the upcoming years in influencing

¹ Personal translation from the original tweet shared by @EmmanuelMacron on his official Twitter account.

energy cooperation through the East Med Gas Forum, of which France is a member country.

Even though the East Med Gas Forum was initially founded in 2019 as a tool to promote regional cooperation focusing on energy affairs in the Eastern Mediterranean region, the newly created organization's running seems deeply intertwined with security, geopolitical and legal disputes in the region, including the ones over energy exploration rights, natural gas reserves as well as maritime boundaries (Dar, 2020). In this context of rising tensions and military standoff in the Eastern Mediterranean, the future of the forum and of its declared willingness to promote values of peace within the region seem compromised and will have to be considered in dependence with the security cooperation strategies adopted bilaterally by France, Greece and India. Drawing on these initial questions, the aim will be to highlight the prospective evolutions of the East Med Gas Forum by assessing the potential effects that security partnerships established by France, Greece and India might have on the Eastern Mediterranean region as a whole.

In this paper, I will first examine the security cooperation between France and Greece on the one hand, France and India on the other hand, as well as the new security partnership that is being developed lately between Greece and India. This preliminary study will then put forward the geopolitical situation in the Eastern Mediterranean and therefore the consequences that these different relationships of cooperation have and could in the future also have for the East Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF) and its ties with neighbouring countries, including Turkey.

France-India-Greece Security Cooperation

France-Greece Security Cooperation

The political relationships maintained between France and Greece have historically been accompanied by close military cooperation in the region. After the establishment of a bilateral strategic partnership aiming at strengthening political cooperation in 2015, the French-Greek diplomatic and security cooperation reached another level in the context of rising tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean. This threat led the two countries to enhance their relationship and to adopt a common standpoint to ensure the security and the stability of the broader region. Through this diplomatic proximity with Paris, Athens aimed at “strengthening its deterrence power”, according to the Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis (Sideris, 2020).

In the first instance, this close cooperation resulted in the purchase of French weapons by Greece, with a 2.8-billion-euro arms deal for the acquisition of 18 Dassault Rafale aircraft and four French frigates by the Hellenic Army in 2020 for instance. Through these purchases, Athens not only strengthened its military relationship and enabled an intensification of its operational and strategic cooperation with France, but it also contributed in forming a national shield by “spending more on defence than at any time in its history” (Marghelis, 2021). This would therefore enable the country to maintain its “military readiness against Turkey [thanks to] advanced and efficient military equipment” (Bagheri, 2021), provided by the French defence industry.

This cooperation has also involved joint military exercises, such as the annual multinational joint naval and air Medusa exercise in the Eastern Mediterranean, as well as the deployment of French military forces in the Mediterranean in support of the Greek Navy. This included the presence of the ‘Charles de Gaulle’ aircraft carrier and the ‘Lafayette’ naval frigate, off the coasts of Greece. Additionally, the decision made by French President Macron in August 2020 to increase the French military presence in Eastern Mediterranean after Turkey’s provocations concerning oil exploitation demonstrates the extent of the military cooperation developed between Paris and Athens. Arguing on the necessity to strengthen the existing security cooperation between France and India, the Greek Defence Minister Nikos Panagiotopoulos therefore points out that “over time, [Greece has] established with France a stable and constantly developing military cooperation framework with which [they] ensure, strengthening and consolidating, a safer geopolitical environment” in the Eastern Mediterranean region (Panagiotopoulos, 2021).

France-India Security Cooperation

Having developed a close and friendly relationship, materialized by decades of political and cultural ties, from the 19th century and which grew during the Cold War, the special ties linking France to India in the Indo-Pacific region have expanded to include security cooperation with the establishment of a security partnership in 1998. The exact same year, France was among the few countries to support the Indian decision to test nuclear weapons (Rej, 2021). Acknowledging shared interests with New Delhi in the Indo-Pacific region, namely the stability of the region vis-à-vis rising threats, including the Chinese military force, nuclear proliferation, transnational organised crime as well as piracy and condemnation of terrorism, France places the Indo-Pacific zone at the heart of its military strategy. The region’s key role in the French strategy should also be explained by the 1.65 million French habitants living in overseas departments and regions, and the benefits that these territories bring to France of which 93% from the Exclusive Economic Zones is located in Indian and Pacific oceans.

Summarized in 2018 by Prime Minister Narendra Modi saying that “We [India] consider France one of [its] most reliable defence allies”, the outcomes of this partnership seem unquestionable, both for New Delhi and Paris (Rose, Siddiqui and Phartiyal, 2018). On the same occasion, commemorating twenty years after the formation of their security partnership, the two countries recalled their commitment to developing a stronger cooperation on defence and security. Modi also emphasized this willingness, arguing that: “Whether it’s the environment, naval security and resources, or freedom of navigation and overflight, we are committed to making our partnership stronger on all these fronts.” (Rose, Siddiqui and Phartiyal, 2018).

Since the beginning of the 21st century, this security cooperation has enabled India and France to participate in annual joint military exercises involving naval (from 2001), air force (from 2004) a regular armies (from 2011), both in the Mediterranean region and in the Indo-Pacific region, including the Varuna naval exercise held in 2017 in France, and in 2019 in India. Coming closer to one another than ever before, the two countries also agreed in making available their naval bases for each other, such as the naval port of La Réunion that can be used whenever necessary by the Indian Navy. Arms deals concluded by the two countries lately enabled France to become the second major supplier of military equipment to India - between 2016 and 2020 (Wezeman, Kuimova and Wezeman, 2021) - with the first delivery of 36 Rafale fighter jets to New Delhi in September 2020 after the 7.8-billion-euro purchase made by New Delhi in 2016. Going further in their partnership, India and France have also demonstrated their will to deepen their defence manufacturing cooperation, especially within the framework provided by the “Make in India” initiative, launched in 2014 by Modi.

India-Greece Security Cooperation

While Greece and India had until 2020 not expressed their willingness and interests in developing close strategic partnership with one another, increasing tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean and the common threat felt by the two countries vis-à-vis the growing Pakistani-Turkish friendship led Athens and New Delhi to advocate lately for the establishment of a strong security cooperation. After virtual talks were held between the two Foreign Ministers in late October 2020 to discuss regional and multilateral issues at stake, both countries agreed to promote cooperation between their defence industries while strengthening their bilateral ties. Putting forward their common values, including the respect of state’s sovereignty, territorial integrity and the rule of law, Greece and India both acknowledged the necessary consequences that later developments in the Eastern Mediterranean region might have in the global stage, and the ensuing necessity for them to counter those threats through bilateral military relationships.

The development of this security cooperation might involve the joint development of weapon systems by Athens and New Delhi, as well as bilateral military training activities to deal with common threats, including territorial issues on the Kashmir case for India and the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) for Greece. This particular cooperation will have to develop into an “ambitious relationship” for the sake of the Indian and Greek defence, according to the words used by the Indian Foreign Minister Jaishankar to describe the aspirations of the two leaders. Both countries have also agreed on the necessity for “the Indian Navy and forces [to] begin to have a presence in the Eastern Mediterranean”, according to Emmanouil Fragkos.

If this military cooperation were to continue to develop in the future with further agreements and joint standpoints on key issues, the benefits for both countries would be multiplied. As Turkey no longer embodies just a threat to Greece but is also becoming one to India, a prolific collaboration might enable New Delhi and Athens to push back Ankara’s ambitions in the Eastern Mediterranean while encircling the country in its direct neighbourhood. This strategic partnership would also embody for New Delhi a possibility to make a significant move in the Eastern Mediterranean region and the European Union in general, considering Greece as “an important member-state with the influence to support [India] within the EU” (Kokkinidis, 2021). On its side, Athens might continue developing its defence assets and impose its leadership in its region thanks to this supplementary military assistance provided by its cooperation with New Delhi.

The East Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF): From Energy Affairs to Tensions on Legal Issues

The East-Med Gas Forum: A Forum for Dialogue on Energy Affairs

First announced in 2019 by Egypt, the East Mediterranean Gas Forum turned in 2020 into an international intergovernmental organization based in Cairo and formed at the initiative of Egypt. The organization, whose charter was signed in September 2020 and is deemed to legally enter into force in 2021, is therefore designed to promote dialogue between regional actors of energy affairs and to “unlock the full potential of the Eastern Mediterranean offshore gas wealth” (Sukkarieh, 2021). This will be achieved in order to “foster cooperation and initiate a structured and systemic policy dialogue on natural gas, potentially leading to the development of a sustainable regional gas market”, according to the press release made after the first East Med Gas Forum Ministerial Meeting in January 2019 (East Mediterranean Gas Forum, 2019).

The East Med Gas Forum's objectives include: "setting common strategies based on shared vision, the formation of a competitive regional gas market, security of supply and demand, coordinating efforts to optimize resource development" (East Mediterranean Gas Forum, 2021). As argued by the French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, the forum's role might as well be to "promote economic growth, political and social stability" (France Diplomatie, 2021) between members of the organization. Among the first projects of the East Med Gas Forum lies the East Med gas pipeline deal, that would involve the construction of a 1900-kilometer-long undersea pipeline going through Greece, Cyprus and Israel, from 2025 (Papadimitriou, 2020), with the support of the European Commission.

As of August 2021, this forum for dialogue on energy issues brings together eight Mediterranean members which are located in the region and particularly concerned by Eastern Mediterranean affairs: Cyprus, Egypt, France, Greece, Jordan, Israel, Italy and Palestine. The East Med Gas Forum therefore gathers countries that have already discovered in the past years large natural gas reserves in their EEZs, such as Cyprus, Egypt or Israel, as well as other countries that might make such discoveries in years to come, including Greece (Eliades, 2020). Other key countries of the Eastern Mediterranean might as well join the forum in upcoming years, including the United Arab Emirates (UAE) which is currently a candidate member for adhesion to the forum, Lebanon, Syria and Turkey. Regarding the latter, Mehmet Ogutcu indeed points out the necessity for the forum to consider the adhesion of Ankara, arguing that "Turkey is game maker or spoiler in the region" (Matalucci, 2020). Moreover, three entities currently hold observer statuses to the East Med Gas Forum, which are the United States, the World Bank Group and the European Union.

Key actors of the energy market in the region are also involved in the forum, including gas consumers, producers as well as energy giants that operate in the Eastern Mediterranean. These 32 GIAC (Gas Industry Advisory Committee) members include:

- State-owned Entities (e.g. Israel Natural Gas Lines, Egyptian Natural Gas Holding Company or Hellenic Hydrocarbon Resources Management);
- Transmission System Operators (e.g. Hellenic Gas Transmission System Operator);
- International Oil Companies (e.g. Eni, British Petroleum, Shell Global, Hellenic Petroleum, ExxonMobil, EDG Group);
- Service Companies and EPC (Engineering Procurement and Construction) Contractors (e.g. EMEX for East Med. Energy Exchange);
- International Financial Institutions (e.g. HSBC, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development);
- Organizations (e.g., U.S. Chamber for Commerce, International Association of Oil and Gas Producers).

The Intertwining of Energy Affairs and Legal Issues in the Eastern Mediterranean

After the first energy exploration and drilling activities were launched in the 1960s in the Eastern Mediterranean in order to look for oil and natural gas reserves, the introduction of new technologies in the late 1990s enabled countries of the region to deepen their exploration and led to major discoveries of natural gas reserves in the Eastern Mediterranean waters (Gür, 2020).

Thanks to these explorations, notable discoveries have therefore been made in the Eastern Mediterranean region. To begin with, the Tamar field, which contains an average of 280 billion cubic meters of natural gas, was discovered in the Israeli national waters in 2009. This was followed in 2010 by the discovery of the Leviathan field, with a capacity of 532 billion cubic meters of natural gas. Moreover, off the coasts of Egypt was discovered in 2015 the Zohr field, with a potential of 850 billion cubic meters of natural gas, off the coasts of Egypt. This embodied “the largest gas discovery ever made in the Mediterranean Sea and could become one of the world’s largest natural gas finds”, according to the energy giant Eni that was involved in the exploration activities that led to the discovery (Eni, 2015).

Divided in blocks for licensing exploration, the Cypriot national waters, that are being contested on the northern part of the island by Turkey due to its geographic proximity, have also been subject to drilling activities. They have enabled the discovery of the Aphrodite field of 120 billion cubic meters of natural gas in 2011. In 2018 was also discovered the Calypso field (500 billion cubic meters) and the Glaucus field in 2019 (140 to 220 billion cubic meters). Following these discoveries, energy cooperation has been put forward between countries of the region. Under the “New Energy Triangle” agreement for instance, Cyprus, Greece and Israel established a common extraction plan for the Tamar, Leviathan, and Aphrodite fields from 2010. Moreover, geologists emphasize that rich natural gas reserves located in Eastern Mediterranean are to be found in decades to come, and especially within the EEZ of Cyprus, which is still being “considered as an attractive exploration area with unlocked potential” (Nikolaou, 2016). These first discoveries and the ones to come have created and fuelled a burning debate in the region regarding the access to such resources and the legal aspect surrounding the deployment of exploration activities.

Beyond these existing tensions on natural gas resources, the Eastern Mediterranean is also torned by conflicts over maritime boundary delimitations and therefore, over rights to exploitation of potential natural gas reserves in the region. Willing to enforce the

respect of international laws and regional agreements, the East Med Gas Forum was also designed as an organization to resolve legal issues at stake in the region. This includes the respect of continental shelves and EEZ, which precisely trigger geopolitical tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean.

While agreements have already been found by Turkey and Libya as well as between Greece and Egypt regarding the boundaries of their respective national EEZs in the region, other waters territories are much more disputed, whereas concerned countries are struggling to reach an agreement. Providing that Turkey is not a signatory of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) which dates back to 1982, it does not recognize international laws over national maritime boundaries and claim territories that are considered by other countries as their own. These claims concern the EEZ between Cyprus - which is the major partner of Greece - and Turkey on the one hand. They have to deal with the EEZ between Cyprus and the Turkish Republic of North Cyprus - which is only recognized by Ankara - on the other hand. Concerning the last case, disagreements have been justified by Turkish officials by the fact that resources of the island should “jointly be owned by Greek and Turkish Cypriots” (Sukkarieh, 2021). Moreover, the rights pertaining to Greece over certain energy resources located around Greek islands, such as Rhodes and Crete, are also denied by Turkey. Ankara indeed signed with Libya in November 2019 a memorandum of understanding on the “delimitation of maritime jurisdictions” in the Eastern Mediterranean, which deliberately did not mention these islands (Sukkarieh, 2021), and therefore encouraged Greece to dynamize its foreign policy, involving bilateral agreements on maritime national borders with its closest neighbours (Grigoriadis, 2021).

As emphasized by the French Armed Forces Minister Florence Parly in August 2020 on Twitter, “The eastern Mediterranean is turning into an area of tension. Respect for international law must be the rule and not the exception. [...] It should not be a playground for the ambitions of some”. Disagreements over the law are complicating the situation, providing that both parts involved in the conflict claim the lack of respect of international conventions by the other part, and that third countries are also involved, such as France. On the one hand, Athens and its French ally argue that the deployment of Turkish seismic vessels, the Oruc Reis, used for exploration activities in Eastern Mediterranean in the disputed waters between the two countries, was done illegally, given the location of the waters that were explored - considered part of the continental shelf of Greece. On the other hand, Turkish officials, including Turkish Foreign Minister Hami Aksoy, put forward the fact that “the deployment of French military aircraft in Cyprus violated treaties regarding the control and administration of the island” (Al Jazeera, 2020).

The Energy-Security Nexus: Prospects of these Security Cooperation and their Potential Consequences for the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum

Relying on France-India-Greece security cooperation that have been extensively detailed, this part will prospect on the consequences that these relationships and their recent developments might have on the future of the East Med Gas Forum. The interest here is to raise key questions and debates at stakes over the possible directions that could be taken by the forum in the upcoming years, given the issues it currently faces and the multiplicity of actors involved in its running.

The East-Med Gas Forum: Beyond Energy, a Future Enlargement of the Forum's Prerogatives?

Founded as a forum dealing with gas, the East-Med Gas Forum was conceived with the role of promoting regional cooperation on energy affairs in the Eastern Mediterranean, providing that “economic interests [were considered] at least theoretically the central link between the East-Med Gas Forum states” (Baker, 2021). However, the emergence of other kinds of cooperation lately, including security and political ones, between member states of the East-Med Gas Forum may question the future attributions and role of the forum in the region. Beyond this forum, several countries of the organization have therefore expressed their desire to develop relationships with new strategic partners in the region. Israel did for instance show this willingness when “expecting to enhance its diplomatic partnership with Greece and Cyprus, and with Egypt”, in addition to its activities within the forum (Bassist, 2020).

In direct collaboration with the East-Med Gas Forum, other instances of cooperation might therefore come into existence to gather members of the forum in order to deepen their cooperation. This is the case with the formation of the Philia Forum, a Friendship Forum uniting Cyprus, Greece, France, Egypt, the UAE and Bahrain - in which four of the six members are part of the Gas Forum - in February 2021, which might embody the future political arm of the East-Med Gas Forum (Baker, 2021). Aiming at “emphasizing security, sovereignty and international legal norms, such as the ones enshrined in UNCLOS” (Tziampiris, 2021), the Philia Forum might therefore come closer to the East-Med Gas Forum and could finally contribute to a shift in the objectives of the gas forum and enlarge its scope of actions, through the development of strengthened cooperation on political and legal affairs of its members.

Towards an Increased Militarization of the Conflict in the Eastern Mediterranean?

In the military domain, many members of the forum already cooperate bilaterally on security and defence issues as France and Greece, or Greece and Cyprus, lately do to counter rising tensions in the region. The role and stakes that the East Med Gas Forum may have in charge might therefore be extended to security cooperation as well. The foundation of the East Med Forum has indeed been considered by some observers as a decision of regional actors, in a shared willingness to “uniting their efforts to combat Turkish-instigated instability” (Nomikos, 2021).

These efforts embodied a response to the geopolitical tensions that increased in Summer 2020 after Ankara “licensed several ships to explore in disputed waters” (Tertrais, 2020) in the continuation of Erdogan’s foreign policy - the Grand Strategy - to decline his country’s energy dependence by enabling the building of a strong domestic defence industry. In December 2020 for instance, the MEDUSA joint military exercises that was instigated by Egypt, Cyprus, Greece, France and the UAE in Alexandria - four of the five countries being part of the East Med Gas Forum - was directed towards the Turkish threat in the region. In this context, Paris, with its interests at stake in the region and its gas companies involved in the Eastern Mediterranean, has already demonstrated that it would be ready to “resort to its military capabilities [alongside the United States] in the Mediterranean to defend the interests of its companies should the need for such a step arise in the future” (Qandil, 2020). Additionally, increasing arms transfers have been observed towards Eastern Mediterranean countries. Egypt therefore became the world’s third largest arms importer between 2016 and 2020, and Athens will likely follow the same path, with an agreement already found with France for the supply of 18 combat aircrafts by Paris between 2021 and 2023 (Wezeman, Kuimova and Wezeman, 2021). On the contrary, Turkish arms imports decreased in the last period, due to the production by Ankara of the major part of its own arms.

Moreover, rising tensions have been observed in the diplomatic domain between Macron and Erdogan, who are fighting for influence in the region and in North Africa, especially in Libya. These tensions were even exacerbated lately by the Turkish President calling Macron an “ambitious incompetent”, criticizing his neo-colonial behaviour in the region and holding him responsible for the “disorders” happening in the Eastern Mediterranean in September 2020, after the French military force gave its support to Greece (AFP, 2020). Similarly, the security cooperation that has been implemented by India with France and Greece will be likely to contribute to tensions in the region, given the potential power shift that would occur in the triangle confrontation at stake between France, Greece and Turkey.

While the establishment of the forum was seen as a means “to make energy resources a motive for ending conflicts in the region, especially [...] the Turkish-Greek conflict” (MEPEI, 2021), this objective seems unreachable for now as tensions continue growing in the Eastern Mediterranean and Erdogan “has been trying to disrupt cooperation [through the forum] by all means” (MEPEI, 2021).

In this context, what about the Peace and Stability Objectives that were put forward by the East Med Gas Forum in the Region?

Providing that the security cooperation in the region between France and Greece, as well as India and Greece, aims at promoting peace and stability vis-à-vis rising Turkey, these activities of cooperation have already and are likely to continue contributing in strengthening the peace objectives that are also core aims of the forum’s actions. The foundation charter of the organization has indeed “succeeded in making history and will contribute to pushing peace”, according to Egypt’s Petroleum and Mineral Resources Minister Tarek El-Molla (MEPEI, 2021). Just as security cooperation has been deemed at encouraging peace in a “hot button region [torned] by growing regional instabilities emerging from significant strategic shifts” (Nomikos, 2021), commercial partnerships developed in the energy realm have also been considered by founding members of the forum “as a means to lay the foundations of peace and stability” (MEPEI, 2021) in the Eastern Mediterranean. For the benefit of the forum and for its economic purposes, it indeed appears necessary to pave the way for peace - “Without a stable environment [...] it is unlikely that financiers and operators will pour investment dollars into new infrastructure projects in the region”, according to Mehmet Ogutcu (Matalucci, 2020).

With those similar objectives, security relationships might collaborate on peace goals displayed by the East Med Gas Forum, even though one should not be too optimistic on this subject and on the estimated capacity of the forum to promote peace, given the deep tensions and subsequent ongoing geopolitical conflicts in the region. The German Foreign Minister therefore highlighted in August 2020 that “the precondition for talks is that the manoeuvres that are going on in the Eastern Mediterranean be ended [...] because for sure the parties won’t sit down at the table if warships are facing off in the Eastern Mediterranean” (Fraser and Moulson, 2020). As for now, these necessary conditions are not fulfilled and will therefore not enable constructive peace and dialogue to be established between Ankara and members of the East Med Gas Forum. Adopting the same standpoint, the Turkish Foreign Minister emphasized in 2020 his perceived lack of realism of the East Med Gas Forum’s manoeuvres, arguing that “such initiatives launched against Turkey and the Turkish Cypriots will [according to him] never contribute to peace and cooperation in the region” (Eliades, 2020).

Towards Shifting Power Balance within the East Med Gas Forum?

While eight countries and 32 GIAC members currently compose the East Med Gas Forum, the increasing strategic importance of the Eastern Mediterranean as a tense key zone to defend, located at the intersection of three continents and therefore at stake for European, African and Middle Eastern countries, might lead to a rise in capacities devoted to the forum by new member states and organizations integrated to the forum. Leading nations of the forum “have [indeed] been pushing for the expansion of the Forum’s membership and mandates” (Bouchard, 2021), while the forum enables “regional cooperation with Arab and European countries, the first of its kind in history”, according to Israeli Energy Minister Yuval Steinitz (MEPEI, 2021).

In continuation of the security relationships which began to be developed in 2020 between Greece and India, New Delhi will also be likely to become a strategic actor in the Eastern Mediterranean region, that the East Med Gas Forum will have to deal with in years to come. Providing that India wants to strengthen its economic outreach within Europe, the country will indeed be involved in upcoming developments in the region, be they economic through its partnership with actors in Europe or military, through the incoming involvement of its armed forces in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Furthermore, beyond strengthening its security cooperation with Athens, the involvement of Paris in the Eastern Mediterranean region through the East Med Gas Forum contributes to increasing the power of the forum. France indeed holds a strategic place, being the only Mediterranean country part of the UNSC and having the most powerful military force in the region. This diplomatic and military intensified presence is involved in the security of the Mediterranean and on the control of immigration - in particular with the ‘Charles de Gaulle’ French carrier aircraft, which carried out not less 140 operational flights in the Eastern Mediterranean in 2019 (French Navy, 2021) - from its naval base of Toulon. Additionally, the French strategy consisting in developing alliance - including military cooperation - with the two Hellenic states, namely Greece and the Republic of Cyprus, could contribute in offering Paris the possibility to impose its leadership to a “small NATO” or “small EU” organization and, as a result, to the East Med Gas Forum too, through its influence (Grivas, 2020).

What About New Perspectives of Outreach for the East-Med Gas Forum?

Thanks to security cooperation relationships established by members of the forum with external countries, such as the newly decided strengthening of security cooperation between Greece and India, the East Med Gas Forum could have the capacity to impose itself in other regions of the globe. “Drawing great international interest in the foreseeable future” (Qandil, 2020), the forum could therefore become a key organization in world energy affairs. In doing so, it would attract world importers of gas, such as India, which would at the same time contribute to the outreach of the forum and to make it a leading organization in the world of energy at a global scale. Even though the Asian market seems out of reach for now for Eastern Mediterranean’s gases due to the intense competition at stake in the continent, security cooperation already developed with continental leaders, including India, might pave the way for the development of energy cooperation in the near future (Matalucci, 2020).

Far from wanting to confine itself solely to Eastern Mediterranean countries, the East Med Gas Forum indeed puts forward its “opening to any country or regional or international organization [that wants] to join, as long as the prospective member adopts the values and objectives of the forum” (Qandil, 2020). In an era when “unrelated developments [...] in the energy sector are now interlinked in ways that further solidify the interdependence of the two regions”, namely the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East (Guzansky and Lindenstrauss, 2021), new perspectives of evolution for the East Med Gas Forum will arise, especially in the case where new prolific natural gas reserves were to be found in the region.

Towards a Greater Role given to the European Union in the East Med Gas Forum?

After the establishment of the East Med Gas Forum as an international organization, the European Union has requested to join the forum as an official permanent observer to the East Med Gas Forum. The proposal made by the EU was finally accepted by the forum on July 6th, 2021. Through this position, the EU “demonstrated its commitment to promoting stability and prosperity in the Eastern Mediterranean region, including through positive and inclusive regional cooperation”, by favouring the establishment of “a structured dialogue on natural gas” in the region (European Commission, 2021). This participation of the EU in the East Med Gas Forum has also been pledged by European members given the advantages at stake for the Union, including an increased geopolitical presence in the region. The securitisation of alternative energy sources and the ensuing economic benefits that will derive from such resources, would as well

benefit the EU in the case of a “normalisation of the whole situation in the Eastern Mediterranean” (Eliades, 2020). Beyond its position, the European Union also plays a major economic role in the East Med Gas Forum, given that the forum is co-funded by the EU, as stated on the official website of the forum.

Taking full advantage of its role in the forum, the EU might - through Greece and France - as well find it easier to engage, alongside the East Med Gas Forum, in its geopolitical power relationships with Turkey. In this context, the forum could become a key parameter in EU-Turkey relationships, especially given the particular position of Ankara vis-à-vis the EU, which was a candidate for the accession to the Union since 1987, before the European Parliament suspended the negotiations in 2016. Through the presence of the Greek military force in Eastern Mediterranean, the EU will also be able to defend its Eastern frontiers, as emphasized by the Greek Foreign Minister Nikos Dendias when saying in August 2020 “Greece will defend in the name of law its sovereignty and sovereign rights. [...] Greece will defend its national and European borders” (Dendias, 2020).

On the contrary, the European Union might also find its position of mediator more complicated to achieve than expected, providing that Athens is considered by Ankara as “a spoiled child that has unconditional support from the European Union” (Al Jazeera, 2020). On their side, Greek officials have also long considered “EU as a protector power against Turkey both in hard and soft terms” (Oguzlu, 2020). The intervention of the EU in debates within the East Med Gas Forum might then be viewed in a negative light by the anti-EU Turkey of Erdogan which do not want to be part of the Union anymore and rejects most of its political and military decisions in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Nevertheless, using its diplomatic practices, the EU has already gotten involved in the conflict, “imposing sanctions on Turkish officials involved in gas drilling in Cypriot claimed waters” in an attempt to temper Turkey’s behaviour in the region in December 2020 (Wintour, 2020). Similarly, the suggestion made by German officials at the European Council in late 2020 to enable the formation of a multilateral conference on the future of the Eastern Mediterranean that would include Turkey in the dialogue, demonstrates the possible role that the EU might play alongside the East Med Gas Forum in upcoming security developments in the region (Michalopoulos, 2020). European countries and the United States indeed acknowledge the interest they have in keeping Ankara as a partner in the region due to its strategic importance in upcoming natural gas developments (Sukkarieh, 2021).

What about NATO's Prospective Role in the East Med Gas Forum?

Long considered as the “NATO Sea”, the Eastern Mediterranean has embodied for the Atlantic Alliance since the end of the 20th century, a place where it needed to be proactive, in order to “strengthen its bonds with regional actors [in an attempt to] encourage the development of partnerships to stabilize the area” (Giuglietti, 2020). Contrary to the EU which does not count Turkey as one of its member states, Turkey has been part of the Atlantic Alliance since its adhesion to the organization in 1952. NATO has been involved since October 2020 in the conflict between Greece and Turkey - both of them being NATO Allies - through the bilateral military deconfliction mechanism it implemented “to reduce the risk of incidents and accidents in the Eastern Mediterranean” (NATO, 2020). The translation of this conflicted situation to the East Med Gas Forum in the case of an upcoming adhesion of Ankara to the energy forum might as well contribute in making NATO an essential actor to count on in the EMGF. In the opposite case where Turkey were to stay outside of the forum, the perspective of a multilateral cooperation on security disputes in the Eastern Mediterranean between NATO and the East Med Gas Forum could also facilitate dialogue and the stabilization of the conflicted situation in the region.

Moreover, NATO has contributed in the late 2000s to the implementation of energy-policy coordination at the European scale between its members and participated in the development of energy security recommendations (Bouchard, 2021). This expertise, combined with its status of “crisis-management forum”, might in the future assist NATO in reinforcing its cooperation with the East Med Gas Forum, on these issues that are familiar to the Atlantic Alliance. Considering that NATO may reveal as a key partner of the East Med Gas Forum to ensure security in the region should however not enable those members that are both part of the Atlantic Alliance and of the forum “to overwhelm the nascent EMGF with their own concerns, but only facilitate regional cooperation” (Bouchard, 2021). Additionally, the frictions that were described beforehand within the Atlantic Alliance between European members of NATO and Turkey should not be underappreciated, as they might also contribute to a stalemate in the situation (Giuglietti, 2020).

Conclusion

This research paper has therefore highlighted the importance of the developments of the close military cooperation existing between France and Greece, France and India, and India and Greece for the security situation in the Eastern Mediterranean. Paris and Athens indeed already have a great influence on conflicts and security arrangements in

the region and have put forward their willingness to further strengthen their cooperation in order to consolidate a “safer geopolitical environment”. Regarding the cooperation between France and India, the common interests that have been placed at the heart of their military relationships in the Indo-Pacific region might as well contribute to justify a closer partnership in the East Mediterranean, where France is militarily active and India now seeks to develop its ties with regional countries, including Athens, vis-à-vis the threatening Turkish-Pakistani friendship. On that point, the “ambitious relationship” that Greek and Indian officials are seeking to develop in upcoming years, which would translate in an increasing presence of the Indian navy in the Eastern Mediterranean region, could also deeply influence the geopolitical situation in the region, starting with the East Med Gas Forum. This organization, which officially aims at promoting regional dialogue on energy affairs, might be significantly affected by security developments of these three alliances in the region. Providing that the forum seeks to deal with energy issues in the region which are interlinked with legal and political conflicts ongoing in the region, it will indeed have to do with the evolution of the security environment of the Eastern Mediterranean.

This research has therefore demonstrated that this security cooperation developed by Paris, Athens and New Delhi might induce a shift in the East Med Gas Forum’s prerogatives, thanks to the development of political links between members of the forum that would complement existing security and economic relationships. Security partnerships between the three countries may also encourage the increased militarization of the conflict in the Eastern Mediterranean. This would make peace and stability objectives harder to reach for the forum, which would have more difficulties to work with a military standoff ongoing in the region. Additionally, security alliances made by Greece and France with external countries of the forum could attract new key actors in the region, including India. It would then enable the East Med Gas Forum to reach other continents and develop even more its outreach to acquire a renowned place in world energy affairs. The strengthening of the security cooperation existing between Paris and Athens, which are part both of the EU and NATO, could finally also contribute in making these two organisations gain influence on the work of the East Med Gas Forum. The EU has indeed become a permanent observer of the forum lately and is a funder of the forum. It has also already been involved in the conflict opposing Turkey to Greece in the region, alongside NATO and its deconfliction mechanism. All these prospects are just a few suggestions made in the current state of security arrangements between Greece, India and France, that will have to be confirmed by the evolution of the forum in months and years to come which, following the implementation of its charter in 2020, is still in its very first stages.

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