

East-Med in the News

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Energy and Environment

News – Aeronautical exercise in East Med – Financial Mirror

Aeronautical exercise “EUNOMIA” is being organised for the fourth consecutive year in the Eastern Mediterranean from 11 to 15 September, in the framework of the Quadripartite Initiative between Cyprus, Greece, France and Italy. It aims to strengthen security and stability in the wider region and ensure free navigation. According to the Defence Ministry, the quadripartite cooperation signifies the joint intent and commitment to implement the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and Customary International Law and enhance stability in the Eastern Mediterranean. The objective of the military exercise is to improve the mutual understanding and interoperability of the participating aeronautical forces. This year’s “EUNOMIA 4-2023” is coordinated by France and will take place in the Eastern Mediterranean and Cyprus this week. During the drills, naval-air operation exercises, Maritime Interdiction Operations (MIO), and Search and Rescue (SAR) training will be held. In addition, and for the first time, it will include the tactical phase of Non-combatant Evacuation Operations and a cyber warfare exercise.

News – Israel, Cyprus and Greece mull energy pacts - and yoghurt – Reuters

The leaders of Israel, Greece and Cyprus on Monday pledged to deepen energy cooperation and explore ways to get East Mediterranean gas to Europe, as well as connect electricity grids. The eastern Mediterranean has yielded major gas discoveries in the past decade, mostly off Israel and Egypt, with interest rising since Russia’s invasion of Ukraine hit flows to Europe. “We will have to decide soon about how Israel exports its gas and the same decisions have to be made by Cyprus. We are looking at the possibility of cooperating on this,” Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told reporters in Nicosia after a tripartite summit with Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis and Cyprus’ President Nikos Christodoulides.

News – Hochstein discusses land border, gas and stability in Lebanon talks – Naharnet

U.S. mediator Amos Hochstein’s visit to Lebanon reflected “Washington’s interest in stability in south Lebanon in parallel with the launch of oil and gas drilling works in the offshore Block 9 that borders Israel,” a media report said. Hochstein and the Lebanese officials “discussed the file of the land border dispute with Israel, in addition of the oil extraction file, on the eve of the renewal of UNIFIL’s mandate at the (U.N.) Security Council for another year,” Asharq al-Awsat newspaper said. Lebanese sources that followed up on the visit meanwhile told the daily that “the file of delineating the land border was raised in Hochstein’s meetings, especially the pending land border points that are preventing the delineation,” adding that “the Lebanese demand will be raised in an upcoming visit by Hochstein to Tel Aviv.” The talks also tackled “files related to electricity, gas extraction should exploration in Block 9 determine the presence of commercial quantities, and the need for a U.S. guarantee for assistance in the exportation process,” the daily added.

Analysis – Egypt’s gas exports under threat – GIS

It is hard to imagine that Egypt, currently the world’s 12th largest exporter of liquefied natural gas (LNG), is suffering an acute domestic fuel shortage. But power blackouts have been the norm this summer. The government announced several measures to ease the crisis, including outages and mandatory work-from-home days for civil servants. While recurring summer heat waves and a higher demand for cooling are to blame for the crunch, the crisis reflects a deeper problem – a limitation in Egypt’s gas production capacity. It raises questions about the country’s export potential and has implications for buyers in Europe and elsewhere. Unless new significant discoveries are made in Egypt, its domestic gas consumption is reduced and local prices align with those in the international market, the country’s standing as a major gas exporter will be compromised, along with its ambition to become a regional gas hub. Natural gas dominates Egypt’s primary energy and electricity-generation mixes, accounting for 55 percent and 84 percent, respectively. The power sector is the biggest fuel user, accounting for more than 62 percent of the domestic consumption. Between 2002 and 2012, local demand grew in Egypt by an annual average of 7.1 percent (compared to a global average of 2.9 percent and an African average of 5.5 percent). That demand was primarily driven by subsidized gas prices and a government policy that encouraged the use of gas in industrial applications and power generation.



Security Issues

News – Glimmer of hope for Eastern Mediterranean as tensions ease – Arab News

The Eastern Mediterranean, for years a zone of competition and conflict, is witnessing the first signs of bonhomie among the principal regional states. In August last year, Türkiye and Israel announced they would exchange ambassadors after a gap of four years. In February, Israel was a high-profile presence in relief efforts in Türkiye following the earthquake there. And Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is expected to visit Ankara shortly. Türkiye and Egypt, estranged since 2013, reestablished diplomatic ties in July this year. Engagements had commenced in 2021 and the positive trend was cemented in late 2022, when Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan shook hands with President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi during the FIFA World Cup in Qatar. In August, Egyptian Trade Minister Ahmed Samir Saleh visited Ankara and agreed with his Turkish counterpart to target an increase in bilateral trade from \$10 billion to \$15 billion over the next five years. Again, in July this year, the presidents of Türkiye and Greece met each other on the sidelines of the NATO Summit in Vilnius, Lithuania, shortly after their respective electoral victories. Following naval confrontations in the Eastern Mediterranean from 2020 and even threats of war, ties plummeted in May last year, when Greece lobbied the US Congress to block arms supplies to Türkiye. In Vilnius, however, the two leaders welcomed the “positive climate” in their relations, with much goodwill having been generated by Greece’s immediate response to the earthquake in Türkiye.

News – Erdogan: Restoring Relations with Egypt Will Positively Reflect on Regional Issues – Asharq Al-Awsat

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said that improving relations with Egypt to a better level will lead to positive results on many regional issues, particularly the Syrian one. Erdogan revealed that he had received an invitation from Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi, during their meeting on the sidelines of the G20 summit in India, to visit Egypt. But he told him that he was first waiting for his visit to Türkiye. Turkish media had previously announced that Sisi would visit Türkiye on July 27, but the date coincided with Sisi’s attendance at the African-Russian summit on July 27 and 28 last year. - Strengthening relationships “We have already set up a high-level strategic cooperation council, and we will work to revive it,” Erdogan indicated, adding that the two countries planned to revive a High-Level Strategic Cooperation Council. During their meeting on Sunday, Sisi and Erdogan agreed to strengthen the course of relations between the two countries. They stressed their keenness to strengthen regional cooperation as a well-established strategic approach within the framework of common interest.

News – Mitsotakis-Christodoulides stress need to restart Cyprus talks – Cyprus Mail

President Nikos Christodoulides, Israeli and Greek Prime Ministers Benjamin Netanyahu and Kyriakos Mitsotakis expressed serious concern over recent actions in the buffer zone near Pyla, underlining the need to avoid any further unilateral or escalatory actions that could raise tensions and harm the prospects for a settlement. Their statements came on the back of the Cyprus-Israel-Greece three-way meeting at the presidential palace on Monday. “We agreed that a settlement which will reunify the island, based on the respect of democratic principles, human rights and fundamental freedoms of all Cypriots, would not only benefit the people of Cyprus in its entirety, but also significantly contribute to the peace and stability of the region,” the three leaders said in a joint statement. “We firmly and unequivocally condemn all forms of terrorism, as well as incitement to violence and hatred.” The resumption of talks to solve the Cyprus problem was also at the centre of a tete a tete between Christodoulides and Mitsotakis earlier on Monday.

News – High Time for Multi-Track Dialogues between Greece and Turkey – Modern Diplomacy

Dialogue is a valuable communication process that fosters mutual understanding among warring parties, paving the way for conflict resolution. Dialogue can take the format of track-1.5 and track-2 diplomacy to sustain channels of communication either when discussions between officials have ceased or when there is need to engage civil society, and groups of experts. As known, Track-1.5 dialogue involves non-government experts along with government officials who participate in an unofficial capacity, while Track-2 engages only unofficial members. While both tracks constitute the so-called “back-channel” diplomacy, none holds the official importance of traditional diplomacy. Since members of these meetings participate unofficially, they have unprecedented freedom to exchange views informally with counterparts who they might otherwise see only as competitors or adversaries. These meetings allow time for one-on-one “walks in the woods” that can generate new ideas and fresh



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approaches to solving problems, without the must-achieve pressure of diplomatic summits. It is upon this logic, that the Geneva Center for Security Policy (GCSP), an international foundation with 54 member states and the Canton of Geneva that facilitates discussions between civil servants, military officers, diplomats, experts, and civil society, provides substantive support and acts as secretariat of the Eastern Mediterranean Initiative (EMI). EMI is an inclusive dialogue platform for collective reflection and action that brings together experts from around the Eastern Mediterranean region.

News – Turkish and Greek foreign ministers agree to revive talks and seek ‘new approaches’ – Ekathimerini

Foreign Minister Giorgos Gerapetritis and his Turkish counterpart, Hakan Fidan, have agreed to revive high-level contacts between their countries and seek “new approaches” to problems as part of efforts to improve ties between the two NATO allies who are at loggerheads over a string of decades-old disputes. Discussions between Gerapetritis and Fidan were held in a more friendly climate triggered by Greece sending assistance to Turkey following a devastating earthquake earlier this year, and Turkey offering condolences after the deadly train accident in Tempe. It is necessary “to build on what unites us and to better understand what divides us,” Gerapetritis told journalists after the two-hour meeting in Ankara. “We have entered a new and positive period in our relations with Greece,” Fidan said. “We reiterated our belief that our problems will be resolved through a constructive dialogue between the two neighbors and allies.”

Opinion – Who benefits from Greek-Turkish relations deadlock? – Ekathimerini

In our previous article titled “Weighing the facts on the road to The Hague,” we attempted to assess the current circumstances and any prospects for progress in Greek-Turkish relations. Our analysis was based on three interconnected elements crucial to negotiations: the terms and framework within which they should occur, alternatives in the event of failure, and the timing and context of these negotiations. Naturally, all of this was considered in light of the existing balance of power, both in the present and the not-too-distant future. We briefly explored the alternatives in case a resolution to our dispute does not materialize through international justice (which is the most likely scenario under the current circumstances). Our conclusion was that if even a faint prospect of resorting to The Hague or arbitration exists, Greek diplomacy should pursue it vigorously without relaxing its efforts to enhance and modernize its armed forces. After all, this has been a cornerstone of Greek foreign policy for half a century and should not be misconstrued as appeasement. Only those lacking knowledge of international affairs would perceive it as such. The reactions were mixed, encompassing both positive and negative feedback. The majority of dissenting voices maintained a level of respect, although a few displayed a clear misunderstanding of the text, coupled with distortions of our arguments. In some cases, these critics resorted to ad hominem attacks and accusations that we were serving as forerunners to an already-decided “retreat.” So be it.

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