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## **Eastern Mediterranean: Consolidating Interpolarity**

The historical interdependence between the Eastern Mediterranean, the Middle East and the Gulf has been strengthening in strategic value, stressing the growing interolarity existent among states belonging to different but adjacent “poles” or sub-regions [Giovanni Grevi, “The interolar world: a new scenario”, EUISS Occasional Paper n°79, June 2009]. With regard to interolar efforts, Cyprus and Greece are politically able to play an unmatched role, given also their geographic position [Eleonora Ardemagni, “Cyprus as Centre of Gravity: Transnational Insecurity and Soft Regionalism in the Eastern Mediterranean”, Eastern Mediterranean Policy Notes, University of Nicosia, n°17, July 25, 2017].

The fifth Trilateral Summit between Cyprus, Greece and Egypt was held in Nicosia, on November 21. As stated by the Joint Declaration, the countries “agreed to enhance trilateral cooperation in the fields of energy, migration, tourism, environment, protection of cultural heritage, information and communication technology, agriculture and the diaspora”. Nicosia, Athens and Cairo committed to rapidly proceed with negotiations on the delimitation of maritime boundaries, also as a way to enhance cooperation in the discovery, exploitation and transfer of hydrocarbon resources.

Nicos Anastasiades, Abdel Fattah al-Sisi and Alexis Tsipras inaugurated the platform Cyprus Egypt Greece Collaborative Innovation Network (CEG COIN) for innovation ecosystems. They also committed to the promotion of joint actions regarding the combat against coastal erosion, biological diversity and nature protection, waste management and climate change adaptation. The countries also signed a Protocol for the strengthening of cruise tourism in the Eastern Mediterranean [Parikiaki, “Cyprus, Greece and Egypt leaders express the desire to strengthen energy cooperation”, November 21, 2017].

The next Trilateral Summit, to be held in Crete in the first half of 2018, will be extended to Italy. As testified by the growing, multidimensional exchanges in the East Med sub-region, Cyprus and Greece are at the forefront of European outreach and cooperative efforts towards the MENA region. On November 9-10, the second edition of the EU-Arab World Summit was held in Athens, on the initiative of the Greek government: the aim is to turn the annual talk into an established EU-Arab dialogue.

Politics goes beyond the Mediterranean shores: Cyprus, Greece and the Arab Gulf states experience a rising trend in contacts and investments. The United Arab Emirates (UAE) are leading actors: DP World encompassed the Cypriot port of Limassol in the Emirati “string of ports” strategy [The Economist, “The ambitious United Arab Emirates”, April 6, 2017], obtaining a 25-year concession to

exclusively operate in the terminal on April 2016; in the same year, Abu Dhabi opened an embassy in Nicosia.

However, the most interesting development is military cooperation. On April 2017, the UAE, Greece and Israel carried-out Iniohos 2017, an 11-day, multi-national joint air force exercises including the United States and Italy [Michael Tanchum, “UAE moves closer to Israel, Greece and Cyprus, bolstering Egypt’s regional role”, Hurriyet Daily News, April 1, 2017]. For the first time, Emirati combat pilots flew alongside Israeli counterparts in air forces drills hosted by Greece: the UAE and Israel haven’t formal diplomatic relations. On March 2017, Cyprus conducted joint exercises with Israel, and with Egypt.

On November 21, after his departure from Riyadh, Lebanon’s prime minister Saad Hariri stopped in Larnaca to meet with president Anastasiades, before his return to Beirut [Angelos Anastasiou, “Hariri makes a brief stopover in Cyprus on way back to Lebanon”, Cyprus Mail, November 21, 2017]. During the 1975-90 Lebanese civil war, Nicosia was a political and financial hub for the Lebanon’s élite. The enhancement of inter-polar cooperation can also represent a precious diplomatic capital, in a highly-conflictual area.

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