

Session 4

New Horizons in the Eastern Mediterranean: Competing Interests and Power Dynamic



Moderator

Ludovica Brignola

Speakers

Professor Paolo Magri, Executive Vice President, Italian Institute for International Political Studies (ISPI)

Peter Millett, Chairman, Libya British Business Council

Tarek Megerisi, Senior Policy Fellow, MENA Programme, European Council on Foreign Relations

Professor Kostas Ifantis, Professor of International Relations, Panteion University of Athens

Discussants

Prof. Tarık Oğuzlu, Professor of International Relations, Istanbul Aydın University

Prof. Özden Zeynep Oktav, Professor of International Relations, Istanbul Medeniyet University

Dania Thafer, Executive Director, Gulf International Forum

Dr. Valeria Giannotta, Director, CeSPI Observatory on Türkiye (Italy)

Dr. Esmira Jafarova, Board Member of the Center of Analysis of International Relations, AIR Center

Doç.Dr. Şuay Nilhan Açıklan, Associate Professor, Ankara Hacı Bayram Veli University

H.E Mazen Kabbara, Ambassador, Republic of Lebanon

Bilgehan Öztürk, Researcher, SETA

Key Takeaways

- The European Union (EU) faces challenges in crafting a cohesive long-term policy for the East Mediterranean. The post-Brexit shift to a more tactical approach introduces cohesiveness issues, notably in navigating complexities such as migration, food security, and the humanitarian conflict in Gaza, with Greece playing a pivotal role in shaping the regional status quo.
- Italy's role in the East Med is driven by its interest in ensuring safety and contributing to Libya's stabilisation. The scrutiny of Italy's offshore deal with Libya underscores the nuanced nature of its engagement, with limitations and exclusions of key stakeholders in security and economics.

- The EU faces frustrations in managing the UN mission in Libya, influenced by energy companies and regional dynamics. Greece's collaboration with American companies and Israel's control over the offshore gas field add layers of complexity. The December 2023 Athens Agreement is seen as a potentially positive step, and Türkiye could become a cooperative partner in addressing East Med issues.
- Türkiye and Greece navigate complex relations, with the longstanding Cyprus issue and geopolitical considerations contributing to recurring crises. Despite challenges, there's potential to compartmentalise energy issues and foster cooperation in non-geopolitical domains. External actors like Russia and Iran influence the regional landscape, adding complexity to East Med geopolitics.
- Central Asia's strength lies in assimilating diverse influences beyond its Turkic identity. Recognizing affiliations to Russia and Islam is crucial. Strategic collaboration with China demands a nuanced approach to safeguard regional interests.

Summary

It was stated in this expert roundtable on “New Horizons in the Eastern Mediterranean: Competing Interests and Power Dynamic” that the European Union (EU) finds itself at a crossroads in grappling with the complexities of the East Mediterranean, confronted with the daunting task of crafting a cohesive and sustainable long-term policy. For the experts of this session, the post-Brexit era has witnessed a noticeable shift in the EU's approach, moving away from a strategic stance to one more tactical in nature. This transition has introduced challenges, notably in terms of cohesiveness, as the EU navigates the intricacies of the East Med.

The focal point of analysis of experts in this session revolved around Italy's offshore deal with Libya, a strategic move that warrants meticulous scrutiny. This scrutiny sheds light on the deal's limitations and the consequential exclusion of key stakeholders in security and economics, further emphasising the nuanced nature of Italy's involvement in East Med dynamics. The EU's journey in the East Med over the past year unfolded against a backdrop of frustrations and challenges. The intricacies of managing the UN mission in Libya, coupled with the complex influence of energy

companies in EU capitals, highlight the nuanced nature of regional dynamics.

Another notable issue mentioned in this roundtable is Israeli control over the offshore gas field in Gaza, particularly after the October 2023 Israeli war on Gaza. A critical juncture is identified in the December 2023 Athens Agreement, acknowledged as a potential positive step within the ongoing web of regional complexities. It appears that Türkiye can become a cooperative partner at least in the search for solutions to the issues in the East Mediterranean.

An extensive exploration into the intricate relations between Türkiye and Greece, extending beyond the East Med, reveals a tapestry of challenges and opportunities. The longstanding Cyprus issue, coupled with cultural misunderstandings and overarching geopolitical considerations, contributes to recurring crises and perceived threats. Despite these challenges, experts of this session stated that there is potential for compartmentalising energy issues and fostering cooperation in non-geopolitical domains, hinting at the possibility of a nuanced path forward.