

Foreign Policy Dialogues Eastern Mediterranean: who (and how) can create favorable conditions for cooperation?

March 1, 2021

Online session

Organized by: CIDOB (Barcelona Centre for International Affairs) with the support of the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, European Union and Cooperation

Since 2019, tension levels in the Eastern Mediterranean have increased significantly. 2020 has been a year of acceleration, but without reaching a final breaking point. Could this trend be reversed in 2021? By whom? This meeting aims at building a shared diagnose, identify opportunities and incubate or discuss concrete proposals for action.

The first step in this exercise is to understand where we are coming from. In 2020, tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean have intensified and alarms have been triggered. First, with Turkey's threat to repeat a new migration crisis just before the pandemic spread. And secondly, following the disputes over Exclusive Economic Zones, the unilateral explorations in disputed spaces and the signing of bilateral agreements with other coastal countries in a *fait accompli* policy. Adding to this, the unresolved Cyprus conflict and the lack of prospects for resolution and overlapping it with other scenarios of tension such as Libya. This tension has spilled over into already strained relations between Turkey and the EU - with frozen accession negotiations and the threat of sanctions on the table - and within NATO - with the controversy over the purchase of the S-400 missile system. All of this has been coupled with the greater involvement of extra-regional actors such as France, Russia and the United Arab Emirates, which has increased the complexity of the situation and the associated risks.

In 2021, the impact of the Biden administration, the post-pandemic recovery plans and the increasing geopolitical competition over vaccines add new elements to this equation. 2021 is a year of decisions, a turning point. The deterioration of the relations among Eastern Mediterranean countries could be irreparable and its effects would be felt in the internal cohesion of the EU and NATO. This would also negatively affect the security of the entire Mediterranean region and beyond (Caucasus, Sahel, Horn of Africa, etc.). On the other hand, given the risks of this escalation, it is also high time to explore different ways of acting. The European Council in March 2021 and the type of messages that are transmitted in its preparation will be indicative of the direction that the events will take from now on.

This reflection group shares the idea that a hostile relationship between Turkey and the EU is detrimental to both sides. And that doing nothing brings us even closer to this undesirable scenario. It is therefore desirable - although this raises nuances and questions about its feasibility and the strategy to be followed - to promote a more cooperative relationship based on dialogue. The group will discuss which are the opportunities for de-escalation, the content of the Positive Agenda with Turkey and on the type of alliances that are necessary for this strategy to deliver.

Programme

4:00 pm

Welcome and Introduction

Pol Morillas, Director, CIDOB

Federico Torres Muro, Director-General of Strategy, Foresight and Coherence, Secretary of State for Global Spain, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Spain

Debate facilitated by:

Eduard Soler i Lecha, Senior Research Fellow, CIDOB

4:15 pm

Towards a shared diagnosis

Why has tension in the Eastern Mediterranean increased since 2019 and how it connects with other sources of conflict in the Middle East and North Africa? How does this tension affect the strained EU-Turkey relations and vice versa? How have the main parties perceived the role and capacity of the actors pushing for de-escalation, a return to dialogue and a positive agenda? And, in particular, in the case of Spain?

4:45 pm

Identification of de-escalation opportunities and risk of new stress episodes

What can be expected in the run-up to the European Council in March? And after? Which de-escalation opportunities can materialise in 2021? Which actors can push for these opportunities to be seized or even open new windows of opportunity? Is Spain one of these actors?

5:15 pm

Concrete proposals for action and possible alliances

What concrete proposals can be promoted before and after the European Council in March? In which frameworks (bilateral, EU, NATO, OSCE or other)? And if successful, how could this impact on the rest of the Mediterranean region?

5:45 pm

Concluding remarks

Eduard Soler i Lecha, Senior Research Fellow, CIDOB

Participants

Amirah Fernández, Haizam, Senior Researcher, Real Instituto Elcano (Madrid)

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Grigoriadis, Ioannis, Senior Researcher, ELIAMEP (Athens)

Gómez-Cambronero Álvarez, Raquel, diplomat, Deputy Director-General for countries of the European Union, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Spain

Hoffman, Max, Associate Director, National Security and International Policy, Centre for the American Progress (Washington).

Lesser, Ian O, Vice-President, German Marshall Fund of the United States (GMF) and Executive Director of its Brussels office

Martín-Yagüe, José Luis, Deputy Director-General, Head of the Office of Strategy and Foresight, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Spain

Martínez, Eva, Director General for the Magreb, Africa, Mediterranean and Middle East, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Spain

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Toygür, Ilke, Analyst, Real Instituto Elcano (Madrid)

Tzimitras, Harry, Director, PRIO Cyprus Center

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