

# Power Balances in the Eastern Mediterranean: From Yesterday to Today

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## ABSTRACT

The international relations are usually examined by the concept of power, where geography is one of the major factors determining it. Geographical maps are not merely a paper reflecting the image of the world: looking at the map we should not observe only the geographical denominations, but to consider the position and role of a certain state or actor, projecting its national interests within certain space, time and conditions. Geographical features and characteristics have a direct impact on the economic development, national power, security and role of the state actor on the regional and global arena. Thus, the analysis of Eastern Mediterranean political and strategic importance within the region cannot be evaluated properly without taking a look on the geography of it.

In order to have a proper analysis of Eastern Mediterranean there is a need to take into consideration the geopolitical theoretical approaches, its place within the region as such, and its position in accordance to the global and regional power centers. Independent and dependent variables should be taken into consideration: here, geographic position and integrity, borders and land structure will be considered as independent variables, while political, military, security, socio-economic, and cultural features and factors as dependent ones.

**Keywords**— Eastern Mediterranean, power centers, actors, regional geometry, geopolitics.

## INTRODUCTION

The geopolitical importance of Eastern Mediterranean can be examined in term of both geographical and power centers. The uniqueness of its geographic position is determined by its proximity to the major landmasses of Europe, Asia and Africa and geographical connections to the strategically important Red Sea, Persian Gulf and Indian Ocean. Eastern Mediterranean has always been the juncture point of the main historical civilizations, cultures, religions, commercial routes, and still is an important arena of interactions among different regional and global actors – main political power axes and centers are intersecting in this geographical area. Eastern Mediterranean is a “meet point” of power centers like United States, European Union and Middle East, of Western and Eastern civilizations, of three major religions Christianity, Judaism and Islam; an extreme point of NATO as well as EU southeastern wing. Consequently, being positioned at the crossroads of major power centers, Eastern Mediterranean cannot stay out of international politics. The Head of EU Delegation to Türkiye Ambassador Nikolaus Meyer-Landrut highlighted the importance of Eastern Mediterranean, in following statement:

“[Due to its unique geography, the Eastern Mediterranean has always been of huge geopolitical importance...the Eastern Mediterranean was home to many world civilizations and great empires over

thousands of years and has been the world's centre for many centuries. Still today, the region is of high strategic and geopolitical importance as the Eastern Mediterranean region brings together many different countries, religions and cultures" (Meyer-Landrut, 2021:5).

Moreover, the proximity of the region to the conflict-prone Middle East and the decades long "frozen conflict" of Cyprus between Greek and Turkish communities residing the island, has attracted attention and became a reason of various regional and transregional, like EU and US, state and non-state actors involvement in the Eastern Mediterranean.

The geopolitical importance is not determined only by land or water surface, but also includes the airspace as well. The Eastern Mediterranean region is one out of the six most important strategic zones that serve as corridors for the military and commercial aviation (Hadjipavlis, 2015: 52). The Eastern Mediterranean mostly consists of the international airspace and Nicosia Flight Information Region (FIR) [\[1\]](#), alongside with Athens and Cairo FIRs, is one of the largest in the region, covering almost whole Levantine basin. The effective control of the airspace is not limited only to providing the information related to the air traffic, rather comprises also issues like border control, protection of sovereignty rights and jurisdictions, terrorism and security. Thus, Eastern Mediterranean can be considered as an essential part in the regional security system.

The geopolitical importance of Eastern Mediterranean region is also characterized by the location of the undersea routes of fiber optic electrical and communication cables that increased and enhanced the cooperation between actors in the region. In 2013, a trilateral energy agreement between Greece, Republic of Cyprus and Israel on the electric cables has been laid down under the sea with an aim to interconnect parties of the agreement and, at the same time, to connect Israel to EU (Milliyet Gazetesi, 2013).

Another important component of the geopolitical importance of the Eastern Mediterranean is the issue of migration. Eastern Mediterranean historically has been a hub of the migration waves and center of dissemination of culture and civilizations coming from the East.

Nowadays, migration is still one of the factors determining the importance of the region. However, the implications of the contemporary migration are more profound; due to its impact on the states' social stability, demographic security, cultural identity, domestic and social security systems, welfare state philosophy, international migration can be considered as a factor of shift in geopolitical balances (Kocaeli University, 2014: 29). Taking into consideration 2003 European Security Strategy A Secure Europe in a Better World, illegal migration and organized crime were defined as one of the threats to the stability and order (Council of the European Union, 2003). The regional developments in the last 15 years, like Arab Uprisings, civil war in Syria and Yemen, rise of the Islamic State of Iraq and Levant and recently inflamed conflict between Israel and Gaza, have led to a new dramatically large wave of illegal migration towards Europe. Eastern Mediterranean became a core for illegal uncontrolled migration and its byproducts like spread of illegal drugs and human trafficking, as well as an operational center for the terrorist activities. The peak of the migration was reached in year 2015 when 885,000 migrants arrived to EU via the Eastern Mediterranean route (FRONTEX, 2017). Even though the number of illegal migration decreased in recent years (in 2022 there were around 42,800 illegal border crossings in the Eastern Mediterranean route, FRONTEX, 2022), the conflict-caused migration and refugee influx are still one of the major problems that have to be addressed. In such conditions and due to its strategic position, Eastern Mediterranean attracted EU, US, Russia and even China's attention towards this geography, thus increasing its geopolitical importance once again (Keser, 2012: 57-80).

## **EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN WITHIN GEOPOLITICAL MODELS: HEARTLAND VS. RIMLAND**

The geopolitical importance of Eastern Mediterranean region has strong theoretical background within geopolitical models. Here, Sir Mackinder's Heartland and Inner or Marginal Crescent theory, lately developed by Nicolas Spykman in his Rimland theory provide us a clear understanding Eastern Mediterranean "magnetism" in geopolitics. The Heartland theory of Mackinder is more continental power centric one and according to it the one who controls the Heartland will control, dominate and establish the "rules of the game" in the World Island, including the Inner Crescent. Eastern Mediterranean being a part of the later, thus, becomes the focus of the Heartland power. Applying this theory in practice, the presence of Russia (as power of the Heartland) in this part of the world is gaining more sense and explanations.

Nicolas Spykman has further developed Mackinder's theory in his Rimland theory. For Spykman, the area of Rimland, between continental and maritime power, is the strategic one. Spykman's Rimland is Mackinder's Inner Crescent, where the Eastern Mediterranean belongs to. Thus, the sea powers, particularly United States, despite being geographically away, is constantly interfering in the region to preserve its influence directly or indirectly and prevent consolidation of Russia's or any other power in the region thus forming a containment belt. In its turn, Russia being a country of the Heartland is trying to secure its position at the same time attempting to increase the influence in the Rimland, thus creating access to the sea for itself and threatening the sea powers that are already present in the region.

In the case of Eastern Mediterranean, Spykman's theory could be intersected with the views of Alfred Mahan on the unquestionable importance of the sea in power relation and interactions. Eastern Mediterranean, being a hub of the main maritime commercial routes connecting Mediterranean and Indian Ocean through Suez Canal and Red Sea, as well as being located in between of major oil and gas pipelines and, due to the recent natural gas and oil discoveries in the region might be a future pipeline hub itself.

From global and regional perspective, Eastern Mediterranean represents a geostrategic center, so it is an ideal location for regional and global actors to project its presence and power into the region. Moreover, it is an area where energy resources can be easily controlled and transported.

Geographic position and features of the region determined the destiny of those as the compass for the direction of foreign policies of the regional actors, as scene for interactions between those, as fundament for actors to locate themselves in the general picture, thus resulting in rise or decrease of their power and, consequently, shift of the power balances.

Such characteristics explain the constant from historical perspective struggle between Great Powers and regional actors for the dominance in this geographical region. This would be better understood while applying Spykman's "Rimland" geopolitical model, who emphasized the importance of periphery, where the Eastern Mediterranean belong to and stated that one who rules the "Rimland" consequently dominates the world. This model might not predict and surely determine the future of the power balances in the region, since this is defined by more complex factors, but is the most effective in illustration of line-up of the powers in the region and the great aims behind their presence on this regional stage.

## **POWER GEOMETRY IN THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN**

The Eastern Mediterranean region's geopolitics is constantly shifting. A more multipolar globe and the culmination of multiple regional crises have led to what is now known as the re-emerging geopolitics. The players who have historically possessed sway in this region of the world are being impacted by these crises,

which are occurring at all levels. We must consider the actors, their interests, and the resources and methods at their disposal in order to comprehend the dynamics of the area. The landscape of actors in the area is also evolving and changing. There are several new domestic and international stakeholders in addition to the established regional actors who could have an impact on the developments in the Eastern Mediterranean. Globalization dynamics and trends, changes at international, regional and local levels, eruption of conflict and rise of terrorism threat, natural resources exploration are among the reasons that have led to such transformations. Moreover, United States destructive involvement in the neighboring Middle East region in the past decades, weakened the US position and its hegemonic role in the region, thus, provoking the power balances shifts in the Eastern Mediterranean as well (iemed.org).

In order to analyze contemporary events we need to look at the group of actors involved in the region. These actors, both traditional and relatively new, are characterized by several differences across many dimensions. Obviously, we have the growing presence of non-states as well. The traditional actors in the Eastern Mediterranean include Turkey, Greece, Cyprus, Israel and Egypt; and Syria, Lebanon and Palestine that are currently weakened by the internal problems and conflicts. The transnational actors include United States, European Union countries, China, Russia and to some extent Iran and Gulf Cooperation Council member-states. All these actors through their military presence, investments and economic influence, their ideological capacity to shape dynamics may change the region from within (Ibid.).

For centuries, Eastern Mediterranean was an “apple of discord” between the Great Powers and regional empires. Tziarras (2018, 14) claims that “from the imperial powers’ perspective or superpowers, the Eastern Mediterranean was seen as a strategic space, not so much because of its own geo-political or geo-economic importance as such but because of its role in allowing the pursuit of greater strategic interests in the Middle East and beyond. An area that needed to be secured and controlled in order for something more important to be achieved”. The history of this region is a history of occupations, conquests, invasions, and struggles of control and domination. The Great power conflicts, wars between regional actors and domestic strife eroded the potential for regional cooperation (Rubin and Eiran, 2019, 1). Therefore, became a synonym of instability, insecurity, and continuously changing power balances.

The geopolitical analysis can be considered a completed one through the examination of actors interacting on the given arena. Here historical background, objectives and interests of the actors and means they use to achieve their regional goals, features of their interrelations and attitudes towards each other have to be considered in order to understand and explain the dynamics and shifts in the region. Our main aim is not to predict tomorrow, but to analyze and understand the elements of the great game, rationality behind actors’ involvement and mechanisms of their interactions.

Following the end of the Cold War era, the Eastern Mediterranean became a new battlefield for the Great Powers competition. Power system established by the bipolar world had collapsed and was replaced by regional power balances. The multipolar system subsists through constant, high and multidimensional competition, encouraging intense systematic volatility that results in persistent interstate challenge. Hans Morgenthau and colleagues claim that multipolarity is more stable because it creates a larger number of possible coalitions, thereby reinforcing deterrence against any form of aggression. However, the most thorough analysis that sets the theoretical foundations for this specific form of approach came from Karl Deutsch who claimed that multipolar system is more stable than the other two because it discourages structural changes at systematic level. Nevertheless, multipolar system is more prone to a conventional war than unipolar and bipolar ones (Litsas, 2016: 1-21).

Although, the Eastern Mediterranean balance could not be named as fixed and stable one. Large number of actors involved in the strategic regional game, fragile geographies, crucial, sometimes destructive changes and developments within the region and rising security concerns are those main factors that defined vulnerable balance of power in the Eastern Mediterranean. The Eastern Mediterranean is a region that in the

past served many times as a weather cock for the rest of the international arena, thus revealing the climaxes of antagonism in various occasions throughout history and it already holds a central role in shaping the multipolar framework of the 21st century international system (Ibid., 15).

### Eastern Mediterranean Triangles

During the Cold War period within the conditions of constant threat from the side of Soviet Bloc, the Eastern Mediterranean has found itself under the dominance of the West. Obviously, under such circumstances the US being a superpower of the Western bloc became the founding element of those triangles.

Triangles US-Turkey-Israel and US-Egypt-Israel were those US attempts to establish its influence in the region and prevent Soviet expansion during the Cold War. The very essence of this relationship came to strengthen a series of policy objectives and US interests, including maintaining regional stability, securing the free flow of global energy supplies, and pursuing comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace.

In the first geometrical relations, US considered Turkey as a European, not a Middle Eastern country, and Turkey was pivotal to US security thinking while Israel was peripheral. Turkey has been major pillar in US policy towards Middle East, Central Asia and Eastern Mediterranean. Turkey was a major NATO ally neighboring to the Soviet Union and controlling Soviet access to the Mediterranean via the Black Sea. Additionally, Turkey-Israel cooperation was benefiting both states due to the threats coming from the behavior of Soviet Union, and rising Arab nationalism in the region. US believed turkey can keep itself within “moderate Islam” model framework, successfully synthesizing Islam, modernity and keeping pro-Western orientation and relations with Israel (Inbar, 2014: 2). In the first decade of the post-Cold War era Turkey and Israel as main US allies in the region have kept their strategic partnership, however, with Justice and Development Party (JDP- Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi) coming to power in Turkey in 2002 led to the reorientation of Turkish policy. The Mavi Marmara<sup>[2]</sup> case had ruined already shaking architecture of triangle and reverted former partners into foes. The relations between Turkey and Israel became more tensed due to the new hydrocarbon discoveries next to the Cyprus shores and Israel entering an agreement with Turkey’s historical enemy, Greece. An agreement on the delimitation of the EEZs of Greece and Israel in December 2010, in contrary to the Turkey’s objections, and a bilateral military agreement was concluded after joint military exercises in 2011 (Tsakiris, 2014: 4). As a result, US had withdrawn itself from the relations between Turkey and Israel and took another policy direction, mostly focusing on Middle East and Libya, Syrian crisis and Iran nuclear program, particularly (Alterman, Malka, 2012). However, the same issue of hydrocarbons nowadays resulted in rapprochement between Turkey and Israel, not without meditation of the US, reflected in the attempts of those to cooperate on the matter of gas pipelines between two countries; thus, the new détente in region between is expected (Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, 2016).

The Eastern Mediterranean has also benefited from the US-Egypt-Israel triangle, which represented more significance to the White House, giving the way for Arab-Israeli peace and turning Egypt from a Soviet client into a US ally. It was obvious at the time of signing Camp David in 1978, which helped to promote peace and to isolate Soviet Union from the region. Egypt’s defection from the Soviet bloc and from anti-Israel Arab coalition drastically improved US position in the region (Inbar, 2014: 14). Moreover, closer ties with Egypt allowed US to sustain military presence in the Middle East by having free passage through the Suez Canal. Hosni Mubarak had continued pro-American policy of Egypt as well, but suddenly erupted Arab Spring took everyone by surprise. The removal of Mubarak and Muslim Brotherhood coming to power with strong anti-Western sentiments and theological clash with Israel, have destroyed the triangle (Inbar, 2014: 15).

As it is obvious, the regional power geometry was effective under the certain conditions of the Cold War



and this status quo failed to be preserved in the changing political and security environments. Nowadays, there is no possibility to outline any other geometry in the Eastern Mediterranean: the relations between actors changed in nature and took a form of bilateral relations and unilateral actions. In fact, still there are triangles established in the region like Greece-Cyprus-Israel or Greece-Israel-Egypt, but those are energy and economy centered ones rather than political or ideological. Energy discoveries intensified cross-regional cooperation grouping and alliances, like East Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF), initiated by Egypt and comprising of three EU states (Greece, Cyprus, Italy), two Arab states (Egypt and Jordan), Israel, and the Palestinian Authority, with United States and France as observer-states. Moreover, the balance or alliance keeping force has been changed as well: if before the power of the triangle was in the actors involved; now the strength mostly depends on the actuality of the binding issue. It would be hard to analyze all the actors within the region, thus, only transnational actors and Türkiye will be briefly given a place.

### Eastern Mediterranean in the 21st Century

The Eastern Mediterranean Sea basin has been the epicenter of turmoil for a decade now. Growing environmental, economic, social and cultural problems coexist within the region alongside the increasing international tensions. The significant gap in development levels between countries, as well as regional conflicts, pose increasing threats to its sustainable future. Today, the changing geometry of Eastern Mediterranean security has some policy consequences for most of the actors in the region. The historical geometry of two intensifying triangular relationships with Turkey and Egypt, gave Israel significantly more security. This collaboration has long served US interests; therefore Washington has, although not always positive, but profound ties with all three allies each of which is central to longstanding US interests and policy objectives in the region (Alterman, Malka, 2012). As long as the Eastern Mediterranean will remain the main element of European security and defense concerns, alongside with the fact of the region being a the route to other critical regions and center of crises and flashpoints with strategic consequences, it will remain within the horizon of US strategic interests (Lesser, 2015: 6-7). This idea was clearly stated by former Secretary of State and political advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski in his work *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and Its Geopolitical Imperatives* provide the guidelines on how to influence major geopolitical centers of the world and people inhabiting those. He claimed that US has to prevent the rise of any other power in the region close to the historical pivot area and maneuver between different power centers, but still weaker than US itself, either all together or separately. Preventing the rise of China, Russia, Turkey, Iran in the region, Brzezinski believed US would open a space for their geopolitical maneuvers in short, middle and long terms, if correctly planned (Gasnov, 2012: 167-168). Decades later, Brzezinski's views are actual among the contemporary US analysts who identified the following threats to US interests in the Eastern Mediterranean as of 2021: the evolution of Turkey from a pro-Western actor into a revisionist force; Russia's military presence in the region; the economic expansion of China; and Iran's access to the Mediterranean Sea. The Eastern Mediterranean was turning into a subregion with its own peculiarities, which required a distinct strategy (Edelman, 2021).

In summary, the geopolitical architecture of the Eastern Mediterranean for decades dominated by the US has collapsed. American political influence and presence in the region decreased dramatically; US transatlantic European partner are silent, passive and prove to be impotent in the regional affairs, despite the attempts to create energy cooperation structures. Turkey has its own political and military agenda in the region. This created a power vacuum in the region, which laid down a background for entering and rise of transregional actor like Russia in the region.

Although, the Eastern Mediterranean has never been in a core within the official concepts of Russian foreign policy, the Russian political and military involvement in the Eastern Mediterranean has increased dramatically in the recent years. This encroachment of Russia in to the Eastern Mediterranean is determined by complexity of factors. First of all it is the proximity of the region to the Russian borders and its

geopolitical and geostrategic importance. The terrorism and security concerns caused by the developments in the Middle East, Syrian crisis and widespread of radical ideas of Islamic fundamentalism constitute a menace first to Russian integrity as well as to Russian economic interests in the region, where issues of oil-gas and nuclear facilities cooperation and export of Russian weaponry are at stake. Moreover, the attention of Russia towards this region is also explained by the factor of religion. Russian population is presented by both Christians and Muslims, which means that Eastern Mediterranean is seen as one of the spiritual and religious focal points Russia's interests, due to the Holy places of both religions located here. Not the least factor is the existence of the state of Israel in the region; taking into consideration that Soviet Union had a role in the formation of Israel after the WWII and a large proportion of population of Israel is constituted by natives coming from the Soviet Union, the presence of Russia in the region is understandable (Rubtsova, 2014: 121).

A special attention should be given to the Russia's military presence in the region. Some may claim that this involvement is determined by the Syrian crisis only. Following the objective of Russian Foreign Policy Concept declared in December 2016 one of the objectives of Russian foreign policy is to "consolidate the Russian Federation position as a center of influence in today's world" (Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation). In this way, making use of the power vacuum formed in the region, Russia has taken the advantage of the situation and absence of US naval presence in the Eastern Mediterranean, expanding its military involvement and thus filling this gap. Russia has retained its Tartus naval base, gained the access to Cypriot Paphos port (Inbar, 19), restored military cooperation with Libya, increased fleet size and number of naval exercises, including joint ones with Egypt (Beccaro, Maass, 2017: 4-5). The "Maritime Doctrine" of the Russian Federation, adopted in July 2022, designates the Eastern Mediterranean region as an important zone for ensuring Russia's national interests. The document states that this region has a great influence on the economic development of the country and highlights that the Eastern Mediterranean plays a significant role in ensuring national security, as well as maintaining the strategic and regional security of the Russian Federation (Maritime Doctrine of Russian Federation, Chapter II, Article 15). Thus, it is obvious that Russian interests in the region are aimed to establish a strong network of if not allies, but at least stable partners in the region and Russia's ability to maintain constructive relations with the opposing sides in the regional conflicts is country's comparative advantage in the area (Kortunov, 2021).

It is important to mention the role of China in shaping events in the Eastern Mediterranean as well. China has made its own geopolitical calculations, especially in foreign policy objectives. These are basically related with China's need for energy access, raw materials, export markets, and security for supply line to stimulate its domestic economic growth, thus the fundamental driver is about regime survival. In addition to energy dependence, China is also interested in trade, development and natural resources, especially with the newly found Israeli and Cypriot natural gas fields, when China began to increase its investments in Israel. Thus, engagement in the region will help to foster China's interests in regional stability (Lin, 2017).

Ever since 1950s, but more so since the 1980s, various organizations are becoming increasingly engaged in regional cooperation and are part of regionalization processes. In the Mediterranean, there are at least three examples of inter-governmental cooperation which come close to it, such as the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP), formed in 1995, since 2008 existing as the UfM. But this is an inter-regional effort and is currently politically inoperative. Furthermore, the EU also implements a pluri-bilateral framework of cooperation with individual Mediterranean states (the European Neighbourhood Policy [ENP]). There is a formal inter-regional international governmental organization (IGO) in place, named European and Mediterranean Plant Protection Organization (EMPPPO), which brings together 47 states from Europe and the Mediterranean. Turning more closely to external governmental regionalizing actors in the Mediterranean, one can identify the following at the global level: the EU, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), NATO, UN and Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), and Arab League states. The peculiar feature of the Mediterranean region is the fact that functional inter-state regional cooperation

has existed for a long period of time. External regionalizing actors promote their own interests and visions of the Mediterranean despite efforts of inter-regional and external regional forums and dialogues having a partnership nature (e.g. the EU, NATO, OSCE and the USA). The USA is also an external actor, which has been implementing a several regional initiatives, like Middle East–North Africa (MENA) economic summits, Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) and Broader Middle East Initiative (BMEI) for the states in the southern and eastern Mediterranean (Fenko, 2012: 407-429).

Türkiye, as the successor of the Ottoman Empire glorious history, could be considered one of the oldest actors in the region that directly shaped its fate. Eastern Mediterranean region for centuries was under the Ottoman rule. With the decline of Ottoman Empire by the end of 19th century and total collapse after the WWI, the newly emerged Turkish state for a period was out of the Eastern Mediterranean power balance but always kept its “eye” here due to a small Turkish community residing in Cyprus. Since 1950s, Türkiye has always been involved in the Eastern Mediterranean affairs and became an important and irreplaceable element in the Mediterranean equation. Its actions lead to the formation of a large tension knot here. Ankara’s relations with NATO, to put it mildly, are far from normal: alliance sees Türkiye as a problem rather than as an ally. The US believes that its “gunboat diplomacy” in the Eastern Mediterranean raised the risk of military conflict between NATO allies in 2020, with Greek and Turkish warships heading towards each other (Popov, 2021). The United States has also repeatedly expressed its dissatisfaction with Ankara’s purchase of the Russian S-400 air defense system. Moreover, the recent events in Gaza also sowed the seed of mistrust between two countries. Generally, the ongoing war on the coast of Eastern Mediterranean between Israel and Gaza seriously changes the situation and balance of power in the region, and, possibly, it will be the starting point for new international efforts to resolve the crisis.

The variety of issues and conflicts in line with the constantly changing atmosphere and developments of the last decade explain the involvement of relatively high number of actors within the Eastern Mediterranean region. As Buerger and Edmunds (2017) put it: “many of the issues encompassed within maritime security are characterized by interdependency, liminality, transnational activity and cross jurisdiction, and therefore can hardly be dealt effectively by a single state, or by a limited interstate collaboration.”

## CONCLUSION

The geopolitics is everywhere and still, notwithstanding to any critique, is one of the most effective methods to formulate foreign policy of the states and explain the current power position of those on the “chessboard”, thus, providing a simple and obvious image of the power relations through lenses of time and space, history and geography. Eastern Mediterranean can be considered as one of the best world “puzzles” to have a look on it through geopolitical perspective. The historical, political, economic, demographic, cultural complexity of the region mixed with its special and unique geographic position and features have become a scene for rise and fall of the historical regional powers, exercise of their influence and power, and as deep as the bed of the Mediterranean Sea, in a literal and figurative sense, interactions between those; it witnessed how friends become enemies and vice versa and experienced how regional dynamics and events effect those complex power relations.

Looking ahead, it is important to identify the political, economic, and military factors that could shape the regional developments, in order to understand the general picture of possible threats and scenarios. Without doubt the Eastern Mediterranean region regains its strategic importance in terms of geo-politics and energy sources for economic interests. The future of the basin is relevant because of the basin’s continued centrality for regional, transatlantic and global affairs. The Eastern Mediterranean remains central to the global economy, with its littoral states in Southern Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East possessing rich natural resources, extensive human capital, and presiding over several of the globe’s most important maritime passage ways (the Suez Canal, the Bosphorus, and the Strait of Gibraltar). However, a region in



flux, the Eastern Mediterranean of today and tomorrow faces a set of complex challenges. The current turbulence along Eastern Mediterranean shores has caused, among other things, state failure, a new wave of deadly terrorism with regional and global aspirations, and refugee flows into and through Europe on a scale not seen since the end of World War II.

Despite challenging problems confronting the regional states, the region holds significant potential. Realizing the best scenario for the Mediterranean will require significant willpower and coordination in building consensus across a set of many diverse stakeholders including state, non-state, and regional actors.

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## FOOTNOTE

[1] International Civil Aviation Organization defines Flight Information Region as “airspace of defined dimensions within which flight information service and alerting service are provided”. There is no standard size for FIRs – it is a matter for administrative convenience of the country concerned.

[2] Mavi Marmara case was named after a Turkish MV Mavi Marmara ship, which was a part of Gaza Freedom Flotilla organized by Free Gaza Movement (Human Rights Organization registered in Cyprus) and Humanitarian Relief Foundation with the purpose of carrying humanitarian aid to Gaza, despite Israel embargo. A military operation by Israel against flotilla ships was held in international waters of Mediterranean Sea on 31st of May 2010 and caused death of 10 activists.