

The Eastern Mediterranean New Dynamics and Opportunities for Cooperation

**Summary of a Public Event
Jerusalem, Israel; 25 April 2018**

On 25 April 2018, [Mitvim](#) - The Israeli Institute for Regional Foreign Policies and the Euro-Mediterranean Study Commission ([EuroMeSCo](#)) hosted a [public event](#) in Jerusalem on New Dynamics and Opportunities for Cooperation in the Eastern Mediterranean, to introduce a new [joint policy study](#) on the topic. The event featured Prof. Panayotis Tsakonas (ELIAMEP, Greece), Gabriel Mitchell (Mitvim), and Dr. Muriel Asseburg (SWP, Germany), Amb. Ron Adam (Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs), and Valeria Talbot (ISPI, Italy), and was moderated by Dr. Nimrod Goren (Mitvim). The presentations focused on the need for collective security schemes in the eastern Mediterranean, the implications of natural gas discoveries, and the regional effects of the war in Syria.

Prof. Panayotis Tsakonas presented his paper, co-authored with Dr. Thanos Dokos, titled "Promoting Collective Security Schemes in the Eastern Mediterranean". After providing a brief description of a series of negative signs of limited regionalism along with certain positive signs of cooperation, Prof. Tsakonas emphasized the importance of creating a limited security regime in the eastern Mediterranean, which will constitute, at least in the beginning, a tacit security arrangement on particular "issue areas": energy security and Jihadist terrorism. Although he acknowledged that that the time is not ripe for the establishment of a comprehensive security regime in the region, Prof. Tsakonas stressed that the creation of a limited security regime should be seen as a pragmatic first step on behalf of the states of the region to build a forum of coordination of their policies for effectively addressing common concerns and interests. Prof. Tsakonas closed his remarks by emphasizing that countries of the region should focus on finding and advancing additional fields for cooperation, other than security.

Gabriel Mitchell presented on his paper coauthored with Dr. Ehud Eiran entitled "The Gas Effect: Assessing Hydrocarbon Development's Impact Upon Eastern Mediterranean Politics." His presentation focused on the relationship between energy security, maritime law, and regional politics, asking whether offshore energy in the eastern Mediterranean can be a catalyst for regional cooperation. Mitchell discussed two main possibilities: an undersea pipeline running from Israel through Cyprus to Greece and Italy; or Israel and Cyprus pooling resources with Egypt to convert natural gas to liquid in Egypt and then ship it onwards. Mitchell also discussed how cooperation and conflict surrounding energy in the eastern Mediterranean works: expansion and development of naval infrastructure; demarcation of maritime borders and subsequent disputes over maritime space; environmental crisis management; and the role of external actors in eastern Mediterranean politics and security. He discussed the complex role of the EU in the eastern Mediterranean, given the diverse type of relations countries in the regions have with Europe. Mitchell closed his presentation by discussing Russia's increasing strategic

presence in the region and concluding that energy is not the game changer everyone hoped for, but with long-term planning there is the opportunity to utilize it and create building blocks for cooperation in the region.

Dr. Muriel Asseburg presented her paper entitled “Eastern Mediterranean Dynamics and the Evolving War in Syria: The Risk of Military Spill-Over and Policy Options for the EU.” She discussed the current trends of the war in Syria, and analyzed repercussions of eastern Mediterranean states' involvement in it on the war's dynamics and on them. Based on this, she examined whether there were any shared interests and priorities that could support regional cooperation and/or peacebuilding and stabilization in Syria. After a brief overview of the different players' interests and involvement in the conflict, Dr. Asseburg discussed several arenas in which the conflict might further escalate - with the risk of violent spill-over beyond Syria: the Turkey-Kurdish arena, the Iran-Syria-Hezbollah-Israel arena and direct confrontation between the US and Russia. Dr. Asseburg also discussed prospects for conflict resolution and sustained stabilization in Syria. She held that it is very unlikely there would be a negotiated resolution or political transition. Also, armed resistance and insurgency against the regime would continue. It is also unlikely there would be a large-scale return of refugees to a Syria under Assad. Dr. Asseburg closed by emphasizing that eastern Mediterranean states lack shared priorities in Syria, and have preferred to pursue their own interests militarily rather than seeking a policy towards Syria aimed at conflict resolution.

Valeria Talbot reviewed the policy study and the three papers that were presented. In relation to Prof. Tsakonas's paper, she discussed the difficulty in creating a security framework due to lack of necessary conditions, but also emphasized the common interest of regional states in defeating the threat of terrorism. Regarding Mitchell's paper, Talbot discussed positive developments in cooperation between Israel, Greece, and Cyprus. And, based on Dr. Asseburg's paper, she discussed the complexity of the crisis in Syria and the risk of escalation there, due to the different and competing agendas in the country.

Ambassador Ron Adam, the Special Envoy for Energy of Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs spoke about how economy and energy can be used in the services of diplomacy and vice versa. He emphasized the potential for an agreement between Greece, Cyprus, and Israel to build a trilateral agenda and potentially to create a new gas pipeline running to Europe. Amb. Adam claimed that Israel has been used throughout the years to practice bilateral diplomacy, and that the trilateral model is new for Israel and holds both opportunities and challenges. He also discussed how Israel is looking to be a strategic partner of Europe in relation to energy. Amb. Adam stressed that the option of exporting natural gas to Turkey is currently not on table, despite the fact that the Israel-Turkey reconciliation agreement of 2016 was largely motivated by the potential for a gas deal between the two countries. He claimed that the main reason for this is the lack of common ground between the countries on the gas price, not to mention the need to overcome the Cyprus problem. According to Amb. Adam, Europe as a whole is looking to diversify energy sources so that Russia is not the sole supplier of natural gas and oil to the region. He also stated that there is much potential for further cooperation among the eastern Mediterranean states on energy issues, ranging from pipelines development to environmental protection.