

## The Mediterranean Climate Change Initiative: Realism or Idealism?

By Dimitris Rapidis\*

**R**egional strategic cooperation has the exceptional advantage of bringing together states and policy makers that share common concerns, ponder upon same risks and challenges, and aim at bridging differences in a more active and efficient manner. While international organizations and fora, like the United Nations with its Committees or the European Union, are said to embed the idea of global governance, they can hardly address crucial issues efficiently. The major element of this systemic problem is that global governance is faced with asymmetries of culture, different priorities, and conflicting interests. Bilateral relations or at least relations engaging states from the same area are said to be more efficient, fastpaced and prolific as common interests, risks and challenges are better addressed and shared amongst the participating

members. For instance, the European Union was functioning much better before the last two enlargement processes than it does today; by the same token, enhanced bilateral and regional cooperation is much more preferred than it used to be in the past, with latest example the joint initiative of Turkey and Brazil on May 2010 to guarantee the production of fuel swaps for civilian use and power generation on behalf of Iran, the nuclear program of which is still contested by the United States and the major European countries. That said, regional cooperation seems to be further advanced as a formula of closer partnership and coordination when significant and binding decisions and commitments are missing by the international community.

The Mediterranean Climate Change Initiative, officially triggered on October 2010 in Athens, seems to



be a great opportunity for dealing with this hot issue: the effort of a group of geographically and geopolitically adjacent states, including Greece, Turkey, Israel and Cyprus, to deal with crucial environmental issues that primarily concern their own sea. The idea was initially captured by the Greek Prime Minister George Papandreou and his Turkish homologue Recep Tayyip Erdogan whose eagerness upon environmental protection and green growth made them urged for close cooperation amongst the countries of the Mediterranean to tackle the repercussions of climate change and establish a low-carbon, resource-efficient and climate-resilient set of regional economies. Whereas this initiative seems to be sincerely ambitious, what would be its real scope and the prospective outcome of this cooperation?

From a realistic point of view, we could argue that it is a difficult task to achieve as the current economic downturn may hinder investments in green economy. Another impediment of success could be the turbulence occurring in the international chessboard linked with the conflicting interests upon energy issues mainly surfaced by the United States, China and Russia. All three are endeavoring to control and regulate the future of energy partnerships and lower the expectations for green and sustainable development in order to secure their own interests. This triangle could merge as a major threat for any initiative whereas the power these actors are exerting can sweep any regional development. Nonetheless, despite the fact that Greece, Spain and Portugal are the countries facing the most striking

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aspects of financial instability inside the European Union, all three seem to be bound to develop an alternative model of growth. In addition, states of North Africa like Libya with great natural resources potential (i.e. gas) can trigger joint ventures and cooperate towards creating an axis of trust and mutual development. Needless to say that the Mediterranean Sea itself possesses great natural benefits such the waves and the relevant conditions bearing solar and wind energy that could serve as alternative, costefficient sources of energy.

From an idealistic point of view, we could say that this initiative by itself is characterized by the perception of common challenges and concerns by all participating members. It can be similar to other fora such as the G20 or G8 that gather the attention of the international community and attempt to address hot topics of our era. Furthermore, the fundamental asset pertaining this action is that all parts involved share similar views of a culture that was interactively developed throughout the centuries in the wider region. In this respect, both the Arab world and South Europe being considered as economically weak peripheries can build upon this project and gain significant geopolitical leverage. This is regarded as a considerable prerogative in the midst of a more and more unequal world, where fluctuations in power and influence are dramatically and roughly changing.

All things considered, the Mediterranean Climate Change Initiative is both realistically and idealistically invested with hope. What is left to be seen is the breadth and proportions that this process will take. Political decisiveness would eventually play the most important role as all states of the region are simultaneously faced with severe problems of macroeconomic stability and sporadic social unrest. Otherwise, in case this opportunity is missed, one more challenge will fall into arrears.

**Note:**

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