

10 Recommendations for Advancing the Resolution of Energy-Related Conflicts in the Mediterranean

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The Mediterranean has become a critical region where security, geopolitics, and energy politics intersect. Recent trends of tensions and cooperation in this region have heightened the significance of the Mediterranean, which is marked by long-standing conflicts with energy-related components. Progress towards the resolution of such conflicts – especially those involving Cyprus, Israel and Lebanon, as well as Morocco and Algeria – can trigger broader cooperation and inclusivity in the region. Energy can play a game-changing role in efforts to advance peace, regional cooperation and inclusivity in the Mediterranean, but for this to happen there is a need to implement innovative conflict resolution approaches. Towards that goal, ten recommendations have been devised based on policy-oriented research and deliberations carried out at Diplomedes - The Council for Mediterranean Diplomacy by a multinational group of Mediterranean experts:

1. Learn lessons and best practices from other regional modalities

Countries engaged in intractable conflicts tend to see their reality as unique and their conflict as exclusive. However, similarities between conflicts and processes towards their resolution exist, especially regarding conflicts that occur within the same region. Mediterranean countries should seek to learn lessons from each other's experiences in energy-related conflicts, map best practices on advancing better inter-state relations, and work to put them into action - whether as a tool for peacemaking or as a way to reach practical mutually beneficial arrangements.

2. Seek engagement, even without recognition

The lack of recognition between some Mediterranean countries prevents direct dialogue, and hence leads to the continuation of regional conflicts. The recent maritime border deal between Israel and Lebanon exemplifies how rival actors can engage indirectly to solve specific issues and enjoy concrete benefits, without officially recognizing each other. Another example is the 2011 deal which enabled the Greek Cypriot side to indirectly purchase electricity from the Turkish Cypriot side - via the two chambers of commerce - after a power plant explosion reduced Greek Cypriot electricity production by one-third. These types of engagement should be encouraged in the Mediterranean. They can foster a culture of cooperation and create positive experiences between sides who do not formally recognize one another.

3. Advance ad-hoc win-win arrangements between rivals

In the case of Israel and Lebanon, natural resources triggered a problem-solving process characterized by pragmatism that can - and should be - replicated in other conflicts of the Mediterranean region. The potential for economic gains and increased stability generated by energy resources provided a unique opportunity to advance an ad-hoc win-win arrangement. Animosity was temporarily and unofficially put aside to advance shared interests, with the assistance of external mediation. This approach holds much potential. Shifting the dynamics of the negotiations, moving away from rigid claims to more practical arrangements, and leveraging incentives can facilitate mutually beneficial outcomes for countries in the Mediterranean, and thus create momentum for conflict resolution and increased inclusivity in regional mechanisms.

4. Enhance intra-regional mediation capacities and mechanisms

Mediterranean countries tend to seek mediation by external powers for the energy-related conflicts they are involved in. Nevertheless, their immediate Mediterranean neighbors may be well suited to lead, or play a central role, in conflict resolution. Regional countries are likely to be directly affected by possible escalation, and may thus be more motivated to advance stability; they may have a better understanding of the conflicting parties, their negotiation culture and central needs; and they can have easier access to key stakeholders within the conflicting sides. On the downside, they may have alliances and interests that could be seen as biased toward one party or another. Mediterranean countries should seek to engage their neighbors as mediators, provide mutual conflict resolution support, and establish a regional mechanism or institution that focuses on conflict resolution.

5. Improve and connect sub-regional energy architectures

In both the Eastern and Western Mediterranean, sub-regional architectures were established to advance cooperation, including on energy issues. In the Eastern Mediterranean, these include the East Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF) and the Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East Climate Change Initiative (EMME CCI). To better support conflict resolution, these initiatives should include Turkish and Lebanese participation. In the Western Mediterranean, the 5+5 Dialogue has been operating since 1990, but only in 2010 and 2015 did its meetings focus on energy and environment. Such topics should become central pillars of future meetings. These sub-regional energy-related architectures should cooperate, including under the umbrella of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), with the goal of improving bilateral and multilateral relations.

6. Collaborate regionally on safeguarding energy infrastructures

Safeguarding the existing energy infrastructures in the Mediterranean region is essential for energy security and for a reliable and uninterrupted energy supply. It is an interest that even rival countries in the region share. Cooperation between Mediterranean countries on this aspect can foster responsible and sustainable exploration, production, and transportation processes of energy resources. This would ensure their optimal and sustainable use, and enable regional countries to have better conditions to try and meet their energy needs. Regional cooperation can also assist the development of new energy transfer routes, help enhance existing energy infrastructures, and foster practical win-win arrangements.

7. Broaden energy cooperation to focus on renewable and green energies

Cooperation between Mediterranean countries is crucial for paving the way towards energy transition, in a region that is a hotspot for global climate change. Energy-related cooperation in the Mediterranean should be broadened to include a coordinated policy for achieving energy security and incorporating renewable energy sources. Regional mechanisms such as the EMGF should expand their focus from natural gas to green energies, as the Mediterranean holds much potential to become a hub for renewable energy production, alongside hydrocarbons, in line with the EU's European Green Deal. Countries in the region are already advancing such cooperative endeavors, bilaterally and with EU involvement, and this should be enhanced, as a tool for enlarging the pie and reducing competition over resources in energy-related conflicts.

8. Leverage the potential role of new actors in conflict resolution

Similar to the global milieu, energy-related conflicts in the Mediterranean involve politics, economy, and areas that require technical know-how. Non-state actors are well-suited to provide best practices and relevant technical expertise that can assist in resolving conflicts which can benefit from innovative technologies. They can also more easily convene rival parties in quiet and unofficial settings. As the Israeli-Lebanese maritime border deal showed, involving private energy companies - in harmony with official state actors - can significantly contribute to conflict resolution, and should be encouraged. Moreover, conflict resolution initiatives that seek to break new ground in the Mediterranean, should seek to be more inclusive in nature and involve a broader variety of sectors (e.g. the private sector and civil society) and societal actors (e.g. women and youth).

9. Promote tripartite cooperation, also with external third-parties

Third-parties seeking the resolution of energy-related conflicts in the Mediterranean can do more than mediate. They can initiate, enable and be partners in tripartite cooperative endeavors, which increase regional interdependencies and foster stability. Successful examples already exist: the Israel-Jordan- UAE electricity-water deal, the Morocco-Israel-EU water dialogue, and the Egypt-EU-Israel agreement on energy export. In such endeavors, a third-party can provide added value or address an unmet need, put in place a viable economic framework for win-win arrangements, help overcome political obstacles, provide a safe space for engagement, and serve as a consumer of energy resources. Such modalities should be encouraged, further advanced and replicated with additional countries.

10. Fulfill the potential of EU involvement, as partner, funder and neighbor

The EU is probably the leading global actor with concrete plans and goals regarding sustainable energy and environment. The EU has been repeatedly emphasizing the need for decarbonisation and promotion of more sustainable resources for energy production, in parallel to its investment in advancing peace and stability in its neighborhood. The EU should thus be encouraged to promote diplomatic channels based on renewable energy, with the goal of contributing to decreased tensions and fostering cooperation in the region. With its know-how and financial resources, the EU can be a central actor in assisting Mediterranean countries in overcoming energy-related differences, but it should do so in a manner that takes into account the real needs and concerns of the involved parties.



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Sözen, Goren and Limon are co-editors of "[Conflict Resolution in the Mediterranean: Energy as a Potential Game-Changer](#)", which provides an in-depth analysis of energy-related conflicts in the Mediterranean and additional recommendations for specific conflicts in the region. It includes chapters by Amb. (ret.) Hesham Youssef, Amb. (ret.) Michael Harari, Prof. Ahmet Sözen, and Intissar Fakir, and was published in April 2023 by Diplomeds, in cooperation with Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung.

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