



The Council for Mediterranean Diplomacy

## Towards Egypt-Turkey Rapprochement

### Policy Insights by a Diplomeds Policy Support Group

January 2023

In 2022, Diplomeds - The Council for Mediterranean Diplomacy launched an effort to examine ways and means to advance Egypt-Turkey rapprochement, as a means to improve **inter-state relations** in the Mediterranean and enhance **regional inclusivity**.

A multi-national Mediterranean policy support group has been assembled, consisting of Egyptian, Turkish, Jordanian, Israeli, Italian and French retired ambassadors, scholars and policy analysts.

The group acted collaboratively to assess current sources of **bilateral tensions**, evaluate steps taken **towards rapprochement**, identify possible confidence-building measures and **fields of cooperation**, and map **regional benefits** that better Egypt-Turkey relations can bring.

Below are the key **policy insights** generated in the first phase of this process.

Egypt and Turkey relations have been soured for almost a decade due to **political differences**, lack of trust and harsh rhetoric between the leaders, conflicting positions towards political Islam, and **different interests and positions** on regional affairs (e.g., Libya, Horn of Africa, Syria, Eastern Mediterranean).

A prevailing sense in both countries was that the **current status quo**, which balances political tensions with continued economic ties, could be maintained and does not put a heavy toll on either country. To move things forward, there was a need to change this cost-benefit analysis and **incentivize change** via adopting a positive agenda.

The **regional environment** is conducive to Egypt-Turkey rapprochement. It is a context of enhanced **dialogue and normalization**. Ties between countries at odds are being improved (e.g., Turkey-Israel, Turkey-UAE, Egypt-Qatar), and ad-hoc **win-win arrangements** are being reached even between enemy states (e.g., Israel-Lebanon).

**New alignments** are taking shape, and new bilateral and regional opportunities are opening for those countries that can find ways to **work together despite differences**. Egypt and Turkey understand this and began voicing positive messaging regarding rapprochement and a **new chapter** in their bilateral ties. They did so through direct contacts that did not necessitate third-party mediation.

This messaging was recently coupled with direct **high-level engagement** between the presidents of the two countries, after months in which bilateral dialogue was carried out at lower levels or not carried out at all. The handshake and conversation between Presidents **Sisi and Erdoğan** in November 2022 on the sidelines of the

FIFA World Cup in Qatar (enabled by the support of Qatar and Saudi Arabia) was a positive development indicating a **political will** to move forward.

These positive developments do not overshadow **conflicting interests** and policy paths regarding regional affairs that are still separating Egypt and Turkey. Nevertheless, the **momentum** generated by the presidents' meeting should be capitalized, and **new opportunities** should be highlighted and advanced.

Egypt and Turkey share a joint interest in having stability in **Libya**, and should enhance their bilateral dialogue regarding the future of Libya and their respective involvement there. Turkey's current role in Libya, which is a concern for Egypt, may be a consequence of Turkey's isolation in the **Eastern Mediterranean**, and may change in case more **inclusive regional mechanisms** are set up.

Egypt-Turkey rapprochement can lead to an invitation for Turkey to become involved in the **Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum**, although pushback on this can be expected from Cyprus and Greece. It can also lead to the formation of new **minilateral and multilateral groupings**, possibly also including the UAE and Israel.

Setting up an inclusive regional forum to deal with **climate change** and focusing on renewable energy could be a beneficial path for all parties involved. Rapprochement can also enable the convening of the **Eastern Mediterranean conference** that the EU suggested a couple of years ago but that did not materialize due to conflicting views by Egypt and Turkey.

Trilateral cooperation between **Egypt, Turkey and Israel** can also be advanced once Egypt and Turkey normalize ties. Such cooperation can advance a variety of joint interests, including energy cooperation, the development of the Gaza Marine field, diffusing **Israeli-Palestinian tensions**, and improving the situation in Gaza.

**Gaza** used to be a zone of competition between Egypt and Turkey. Once their mutual trust is restored (and this might take time), cooperation – in coordination with Israel and the Palestinian Authority – can be envisioned, following the example of the role that **Qatar** is playing in Gaza, that is accepted by all sides.

Opportunities for **conflict resolution support** can also emerge, including Egyptian help in diffusing tensions in Syria that Turkey perceives as an existential threat. Egypt's assistance in reaching the 1998 Adana Agreement could serve as a model for future Egyptian mediation between **Turkey and Syria**. Besides, Egypt could support efforts for talks between **Turkey, Greece and Cyprus**, in a broader attempt to resolve the Cyprus issue.

The key to a productive dialogue between Egypt and Turkey is adopting a **positive agenda**, with an effort to overcome or sideline past grievances. The starting point should be the **re-appointment of ambassadors**, the launching of a sustained high-level dialogue channel (including a presidential summit), and a focus on less controversial issues.

Egypt and Turkey could also intensify the activity of their **joint business council**, scale up **business cooperation**, increase tourism and educational mobility, **cooperate on issues** related to infrastructure and public health, revive their past naval exercises, and seek ways to jointly advance **regional stability**.