ASIAN POWERS IN THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN

Abstract Booklet

24 September 2021

Scientific Board of the Conference:

Prof. Qingan (Angus) Huang

Prof. Emre İşeri

Dr. Defne Gönenç

Organizers

Yaşar University Center for Mediterranean Studies

International Business School of Guangdong University of Finance & Economics

University of East London Centre for the Study of States, Markets & People (STAMP)

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Preface

In the new multipolar world order, several transformations are taking place with significant implications for the Eastern Mediterranean. It is a region widely known for its beautiful scenery, often cloudless blue sky, picturesque beaches, tasty fruits, and vegetables as well as welcoming and vigorous people. However, as neoliberal capitalism deepens and widens, the region is destabilized by competition for capital accumulation and disrupted by multi-faceted conflicts with the involvement of many actors. The rivalry among multinational companies and states over oil and gas resources, consequences of Arab uprisings, Syrian Civil War, COVID-19 pandemic, continuous migratory movements, cycles of violence in the Levant, problems between Turkey, Greece, and Egypt, depressing socio-economic pressures, economic crisis in several countries, serious climate vulnerability, and rising religious movements produce mixed feelings about the future of the region.

The region represents various geopolitical challenges and is also particularly disposed to international involvement. For instance, China, through the "Belt and Road Initiative" has been undertaking a massive land and maritime initiative for stimulating connection of East Asia to Europe by also passing through the Mediterranean region. Hence, what is the role of Asian powers in the Eastern Mediterranean? What forms of relations are occurring and what is the political economy and ecology of their involvement? As Yaşar University Center for Mediterranean Studies together with the International Business School of Guangdong University of Finance & Economics, and University of East London Centre for the Study of States, Markets & People (STAMP), we decided to organize an academic conference that will allow for the critical elaboration of the Asian engagement in the Eastern Mediterranean. The purpose is to prepare a special issue for the *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* following to the conference.

We hope that this conference and critical ideas arising out of it will contribute to a green, hopeful, and pleasant future for the Eastern Mediterranean, and the world at large.

Organizing Team

ASIAN POWERS IN THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN

Conference Program, 24 September 2021
Online

(09:00-18:00 UTC+3, Izmir)
(14:00-23:00 UTC+8, Guangdong)
(07:00-16:00 UTC+1, London)

Opening Session

09:00- 10:30 (UTC+3)
14:00- 15:30 (UTC+8)
07:00 – 08:30 (UTC+1)

09:00 – 09:30: Institutional Greetings and Welcome
Defne GÖNENÇ, *Yaşar University*

Opening Speech: **Sinan ÜNLÜSOY**, *Yaşar University*
Opening Speech: **Aylin GÜNEY**, *Yaşar University*
Opening Speech: **Qingan A. HUANG**, *Guangdong University of Finance and Economics & University of East London*

09:30- 10:30: Keynote Speech
Vassilis K. FOUSKAS, *University of East London*
"State Competition and Capital Accumulation Regimes in the Eastern Mediterranean"

Break: 10:30 – 10:45 (UTC+3) / 15:30 – 15:45 (UTC+8) / 08:30 – 08:45 (UTC+1)

1st Session **10:45 – 12:15 (UTC+3)**
15:45 – 17:15 (UTC +8)
08:45 – 10:15 (UTC+1)

Chair: Aylin GÜNEY, Yaşar University

10:45 – 11:00: Stefanos KORDOSIS, *International Hellenic University*
"*What does Macrohistory tell us about the role of the Black Sea and Eastern Mediterranean in trans-Eurasian Communication? An Approach to Belt and Road Initiative beyond Economy*"

11:00 – 11:15: Meliha ALTUNIŞIK & Derya GÖÇER, *Middle East Technical University*
"Iran's presence in the Eastern Mediterranean: Identity, Pragmatism and Survival"

11:15 – 11:30: Hayriye KAHVECİ, *Middle East Technical University Northern Cyprus Campus*
"Balancing Act Between East and West: China factor in Greece and Cyprus's Search for Geopolitical Upper Hand in the Eastern Mediterranean"

11:30 – 11:45: Hua GENG, Benzhao YANG & Qingan A. HUANG, *Xi'an University of Architecture and Technology, North-western Polytechnical University, Guangdong University of Finance and Economics & University of East London*
"Chinese Corporate Outbound Investment in the Eastern Mediterranean Region under Belt and Road Initiative"

11:45 – 12:15: Q&A

Lunch: 12:15 – 13:15 (UTC+3) / 17:15 – 18:15 (UTC+8) / 10:15 – 11:15 (UTC+1)

2nd Session: **13:15 – 14:45 (UTC+3)**
18:15 – 19: 45 (UTC+8)
11:15 – 12:45 (UTC+1)

Three Themed Sessions on "China"

Session 2A: 13:15- 14:45 (UTC +3)/ 18:15 – 19: 45 (UTC+8) / 11:15 – 12:45 (UTC+1)

Chair: Ekaterina KOLDUNOVA, Moscow State Institute of International Relations & Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia

13:15 – 13:30: Zhiqiang ZOU, *Fudan University*
"*China's Port Investment in the Mediterranean and EU's Perception*"

13:30 – 13:45: Yahya GÜLSEVEN, *Başkent University*
"China and the South-South Cooperation: The Case of Egypt"

13:45 – 14:00: Clemens HOFFMAN & Ceren ERGENÇ, *University of Stirling & Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University*
"China's Role in the Geopolitical Ecology of Decarbonisation in the Eastern Mediterranean"

14:00 – 14:15: Çağdaş ÜNGÖR, *Marmara University*
"Vaccine Shots in the Eastern Mediterranean: Chinese Propaganda and Soft Power in the post-Covid World"

14:15 – 14:45: Q&A

Session 2B: 13:15- 14:45 (UTC +3)/ 18:15 – 19: 45 (UTC+8) / 11:15 – 12:45 (UTC+1)

Chair: Qingan A. HUANG, Guangdong University of Finance and Economics & University of East London

13:15 – 13:30: Melda AKOĞLU ŞİŞMAN, *Republic of Turkey Ministry of Trade*
"*A Comparative Analysis of Commercial Relations of East Mediterranean Countries with the EU and China***"**

13:30 – 13:45: Jiuzhou DUAN, *Tsinghua University*
"Strategic Synergy: Production Capacity Cooperation Between China and East Mediterranean Countries"

13:45 – 14:00: Selim ÖTERBÜLBÜL, *Ankara University*
"China's Foreign Policy in the Eastern Mediterranean: Zone of Conflict or Zone of Cooperation?"

14:00 – 14:15: Ahmet Faruk IŞIK, *Shanghai International Studies University*
"50th Anniversary of Turkey-China Diplomatic Ties: Expectation and Feasibility"

14:15 – 14:45: Q&A

Session 2C: 13:15- 14:45 (UTC +3)/ 18:15 – 19: 45 (UTC+8) / 11:15 – 12:45 (UTC+1)

Chair: Emre İŞERİ, Yaşar University

13:15 – 13:30: Degang SUN, *Fudan University*
"China's Party Diplomacy towards the Arab Countries"

13:30 – 13:45: Cem YILMAZ, *Independent researcher*
"Egypt as the Gateway for China to Europe through Eastern Mediterranean"

13:45 – 14:00: Ahmet ATEŞ and Anıl Çağlar ERKAN, *Iğdır University & Mehmet Akif University*
"*The Levant in Chinese Grand Strategy"*

14:00 – 14:15: Meysune YAŞAR, *İstanbul Medeniyet University*
"Maritime Security Regime in the Eastern Mediterranean: The Role of Chinese Navy towards Booth Model in Xi Jinping Era"

14:15 – 14:45: Q&A

Break: 14:45 – 15:00 (UTC+3) / 19:45 – 20:00 (UTC+8) / 12:45 – 13:00 (UTC+1)

3rd Session:

15:00 – 16:30 (UTC+3)
20: 00 – 21:30 (UTC +8)
13:00 – 14:30 (UTC+1)

Themed Session on "Russia and Eurasia"

Chair: Meliha ALTUNIŞIK, Middle East Technical University

15:00 – 15:15: Pavel SHLYKOV & Ekaterina KOLDUNOVA, *Moscow State University, Moscow State Institute of International Relations & Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia*
"Russia and China in the Eastern Mediterranean: on the Parallel Tracks?"

15:15 – 15:30: Hasan Selim ÖZERTEM, *Independent researcher*
"*Russia's Power Projection in the Eastern Mediterranean: The Cases of Libya and Syria*"

15:30 – 15:45: Volkan ÖZDEMİR, *Başkent University*
"Geopolitical Economy of Turkey and its Interactions with Eurasian Powers"

15:45 – 16:00: Mehmet BARDAKÇI, *İstanbul Aydın University*
"Geopolitics of Religion: The Russian Religious Soft Power in the Eastern Mediterranean"

16:00 – 16:30: Q&A

Break: 16:30 – 16:45 (UTC+3) / 21:30 – 21:45 (UTC+8) / 14:30 – 14:45 (UTC+1)

4th Session: **16:45 – 18:00 (UTC+3)**
21:45 – 23:00 (UTC +8)
14: 45 – 16:00 (UTC +1)

Themed Session on "Foreign Policy"

Chair: Sinan ÜNLÜSOY, Yaşar University

16:45 – 17:00: Rajeev Ranjan CHATURVEDY & Defne GÖNENÇ, *Nalanda University and Yaşar University*
"*Indian Foreign Policy towards the East-Mediterranean in a Changing Regional Order*"

17:00 – 17:15: Hatice ÇELİK, *Social Sciences University of Ankara*
"*South Korea's East Mediterranean Policy: A New Geopolitical Region?*"

17:15 – 17:30: Elif ÇETİN & Kohei IMAI, *Yaşar University, University of Cambridge & Japan External Trade Organization Institute of Developing Economies*
"*Japan's Shifting Policy Priorities in the MENA Region: Japanese-Turkish Relations as a Case Study*"

17:30 – 18:00: Q&A and Concluding Remarks

1st Session

10:45 – 12:15 (UTC+3)
15:45 – 17:15 (UTC +8)
08:45 – 10:15 (UTC+1)

Stefanos KORDOSIS, *International Hellenic University*

"*What does Macrohistory tell us about the role of the Black Sea and Eastern Mediterranean in trans-Eurasian Communication? An Approach to Belt and Road Initiative beyond Economy*"

By looking at Macrohistoric narratives about East-West interaction, starting from the early Middle Ages and moving into modern times, the announcement aims at identifying the special role that the Black Sea and Eastern Mediterranean region played in previous trans-Eurasian integration projects. It then moves to relate the macro-historic narratives with the grand geopolitical narratives about Eurasia (Mackinder, Mahan, and Spykman) and modify them accordingly, in an attempt to create analytical tools to understand Belt and Road Initiative's geopolitics, particularly in the Black Sea and Eastern Mediterranean regions. The aim is to provide a context for explanation that goes beyond short-term economic analyses.

Keywords: Belt and Road Initiative, Eastern Mediterranean, Land Power, Middle Tier (Mackinder), Nomadic and Sedentary Empires

Meliha ALTUNIŞIK & Derya GÖÇER, *Middle East Technical University*

"Iran's presence in the Eastern Mediterranean: Identity, Pragmatism and Survival"

Iran's presence in the Eastern Mediterranean region has been famously labelled by King Abdullah in 2004 as part of the 'Shia Crescent' and is generally interpreted alongside the sectarian lines which supposedly ties Iran to Lebanon and Syria. However, there is another interpretation of Iran's continuing and increasing presence that emphasizes pragmatic aspects of Iranian foreign policy towards the region. Since the changes brought by the Arab Uprisings in the Eastern Mediterranean, Iran's already complex relations with key players in the region, including Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, Israel, the Palestinians, and the EU has gotten more layered than before. While Iran continued to rely more heavily on the established proxies, it also started projecting direct IRGC presence. Taking its inspiration from the critical geography and critical area studies literatures, this paper will focus on the last 10 years of Iran's presence in the Eastern Mediterranean and how it has evolved over time. Going beyond the binary reading of Iran as either representing religious fanaticism along sectarian lines or pure pragmatism, the paper will discuss the different ways in which Iran has been engaging with the dynamics in this region.

Also playing a role in shaping Iranian position towards the Eastern Mediterranean are Iran's shifting relations with extra-regional actors, most notably the US and China. On the one hand, there has been the signing and unravelling of the nuclear deal and finally the re-start of the negotiations under the Biden administration. On the other hand, there are growing relations with China that has reached to a new level with the signing of Iran-China 25-year Cooperation Program. This interplay between the dominant and the rising power in the international system then has an impact on the way Iran approaches the region of Eastern Mediterranean especially with the latter's Belt and Road Initiative and the role of Iran and its regional allies in it. This paper will attempt to outline the multiple layers of Iran's presence in the region and analyse its new and old linkages with extra-regional powers.

Keywords: Iranian foreign policy, Eastern Mediterranean, critical area studies, Belt and Road Initiative, nuclear deal

Hayriye KAHVECİ, *Middle East Technical University Northern Cyprus Campus*

"Balancing Act Between East and West: China factor in Greece and Cyprus's Search for Geopolitical Upper Hand in the Eastern Mediterranean"

One of the geopolitical hotspots of the Cold War, Eastern Mediterranean has become a centre of attention during the last decade once again. At the centre of the stage, this time was hydrocarbon discoveries, exploration activities, and the power game revolving around the search for the geopolitical upper hand. When coupled with the political turmoil and leadership changes in the Arab countries having shores to the Mediterranean, the region became the centre of a complex web of threats and interests. The purpose of this paper is twofold. On the one hand, it looks at the nature of the regional and transregional relations that emerged in the Eastern Mediterranean after the end of the Cold War. It is argued that the involvement of Western countries, particularly EU and US, in the Eastern Mediterranean is primarily motivated by the securitization habits of the Cold War era. However, they are not the only actors in the region. Over the past decade, there is increasing visibility of the Asian players in the region. In the second part of the paper, the focus is on one of those actors, China. It is argued that the Chinese involvement in the Eastern Mediterranean has a different tone from the West and is primarily motivated by increasing the country's economic role within the region. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) of China has been influential in acquiring a critical economic role for the country, especially in the construction of strategic infrastructure projects, development of 5G networks, and transportation infrastructures such as ports. China's policy choice was perceived to be an opportunity by Greece and Cyprus in fighting against the negative effects of economic crises and increase their geopolitical stronghold in the post-Cold War geopolitical environment of the Eastern Mediterranean.

Keywords: Eastern Mediterranean, geopolitics, China, Cyprus, Greece

Hua GENG, Benzhao YANG & Qingan A. HUANG, *Xi'an University of Architecture and Technology, North-western Polytechnical University, Guangdong University of Finance and Economics & University of East London*

"Chinese Corporate Outbound Investment in the Eastern Mediterranean Region under Belt and Road Initiative"

The Eastern Mediterranean Region (EMR), as the world's highly unstable area with violent conflicts and the origin of the largest refugee population embedded in worldwide debate, is a big hub of some low- and middle-income countries. However, this region also gets universal concentration because of its significance of active quality in tectonics and abundance in energy resources. With the coexistence of both the challenges and the opportunities, nations and corporations have paid more attention to EMR. Inspired by China's Belt and Road Initiative which was launched to improve regional connectivity and prompt economic cooperation, this paper contributes to distinguish Chinese corporate investment motivations, different forms outward investment and risks in EMR through focusing on the ever-increasing connection between the eastern Mediterranean Sea and China along the 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road and the economic boost in global trade through BRI investment. Instead of government-driven investment, new thoughts have been put forward from the perspective of corporate entrepreneurial expansion, such as the phenomena of innovation, revitalizing the industry, and creating cross-national market prospect etc. at the firm level. Case study would be utilized to investigate the corporate entrepreneurship projects in littoral countries of the eastern Mediterranean Sea like Turkey, Egypt etc. to explore the common gains and existing problems on the basis of previous literature and investment projects. Through critical assessment and parallel comparison of the cases, a prediction of future corporate investment momentum would be made for other Chinese transnational enterprises or firms with the intention to operate cross-border business, so as to achieve the broad-based win-win economic objective and cooperation in this area.

Keywords: Outbound investment; corporation; Eastern Mediterranean Region (EMR); Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)

2nd Sessions

13:15 – 14:45 (UTC+3)
18:15 – 19: 45 (UTC+8)
11:15 – 12:45 (UTC+1)

Three Themed Sessions on "China"

A- B- C



Zhiqiang ZOU, *Fudan University*

"*China's Port Investment in the Mediterranean and EU's Perception*"

The Mediterranean is a key link in the construction of the "Maritime Silk Road" for China. In recent years, China has increased its investment in port construction in the Mediterranean region, Greece, Egypt, Turkey, Italy, Spain and Morocco have become key targets. However, the EU, which has always regarded the Mediterranean as its sphere of influence, has a complicated attitude towards China's port investment in the region. It has strategic doubts about security, politics, and economics, and may follow the United States in taking hedging strategy, which intensifies the risk of port politicization in the region. In terms of security, EU worried that China's commercial port projects have security purposes behind it and will erode its own geographic influence; politically, the EU worried that China's port investment will affect European countries' policies toward China and cause internal division in Europe; economically, EU Worried that China's port investment may subvert the existing European port and shipping pattern. In this context, China's port investment in the Mediterranean should highlight the attributes of commercialization and multilateralization, attach great importance to strategic docking and interest integration with EU, and strive to resolve the risk of "port politicization".

Keywords: China; EU; Mediterranean; Port Investment; the Maritime Silk Road

Yahya GÜLSEVEN, *Başkent University*

"China and the South-South Cooperation: The Case of Egypt"

This study focuses on China's South-South Cooperation (SSC) discourse and practices, by examining some examples of development cooperation activities carried out by China in Egypt in recent years. China officially claims that its development cooperation activities fall under the category of South-South cooperation and are essentially different from the traditional North- South cooperation model. As a donor, China constantly tries to differentiate itself from the traditional Western donors by claiming that its South-South cooperation facilitates self-reliance and independent development among the developing countries. On the other hand, the Western donor community expresses concerns over China's development cooperation practices. China's development cooperation policy - based on the strategy of the merging of aid, trade, and investment - has been accused of using aid in the pursuit of securing energy and raw materials, finding markets for its products, and overloading poor countries with debt. At the most extreme, concerns have been raised that, far from providing a real alternative, China's South-South Cooperation replicates the pattern of the North-South relations and the Western colonial practices. This study first discusses whether and to what extent China has used the South-South cooperation mechanisms, which it strongly recommends to the other developing countries, in its own development efforts. Next, it looks into how China has applied the South-South Cooperation principles and mechanisms in partner countries by examining examples of China's development cooperation activities in Egypt. Finally, utilizing the insights of the Neo- Gramscian approach, all these discussions are related to a more general discussion that critically questions the potential of China's South-South Cooperation to promote a self-sufficient and independent development model for developing countries.

Keywords: China, Development Cooperation, Egypt, Neo-Gramscian Approach, South-South Cooperation.

Clemens HOFFMAN & Ceren ERGENÇ, *University of Stirling & Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University*

"China's Role in the Geopolitical Ecology of Decarbonisation in the Eastern Mediterranean"

The world's attention currently appears focused on the power struggle in the Eastern Mediterranean dressed up as a 'gas conflict', however, there has been massive expansion of solar investments in Egypt, Morocco, and an expansion of wind plants in Greece and Turkey. Additionally, the hydro-developments along the Nile, Euphrates and Tigris, as well as the miraculous re-invention of the Gulf as a hub for 'eco-cities' all seemingly point to a bright 'green' carbon neutral future of the region. Or do they?

The underlying dynamics of energy geopolitics in the Eastern Mediterranean produce a peculiar mixture of continuities and ruptures in international markets, development banks and the developmental, neo-colonial policies of Asia's rising powers and neoliberal policies of the European Union. Relationships of dependency are maintained, but actors change - mainly through mixed lines of public and private finance as well as technology transfer where Asian and Western geostrategic interests collide. Renewables are projects of state building and geopolitical power projection. Therefore, such hegemonic rivalry is also prone to new 'decarbonisation conflicts'.

This paper investigates the role of China in reshaping the geopolitics of energy in the Eastern Mediterranean, with a case study on Egypt and its solar industry. China's green investment plan, domestically and in the context of Belt and Road Initiative, constitutes a source of significant economic gain because China already dominates the production and finance markets of green technology besides its traditional investments in brown technologies. China's rising economic power allows it to relocate polluting technologies and force its partners to transition to sustainable technologies. Since the green technology supply market is dominated by both state-owned enterprises (SOEs) and non-SOEs in China, the country's green investment in the Eastern Mediterranean forces changes in its previous mode of engagement with the region. Egypt is a case in point for a new political economy emerging in the Eastern Mediterranean with the involvement of China.

Keywords: Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), Decarbonisation, Geopolitical Economy, Solar, Egypt

Çağdaş ÜNGÖR, *Marmara University*

"Vaccine Shots in the Eastern Mediterranean: Chinese Propaganda and Soft Power in the post-Covid World"

China's inactivated coronavirus vaccines (most notably those produced by the pharmaceutical companies, Sinovac and Sinopharm) have become important assets in the country's post-COVID diplomacy, which aims at repairing the reputational damage China suffered when it was the first epicenter of the disease during the winter of 2019-20. Following the containment of the epidemic at home, the People's Republic of China (PRC) regime launched a propaganda campaign abroad to publicize its success story. By the first anniversary of the crisis, China-made vaccines became the most significant items in this campaign, replacing masks and test kits which previously dominated the agenda. In the winter and spring of 2021, several Eastern Mediterranean countries, such as Lebanon, Syria and Palestine, received Chinese vaccines free of charge. Other regional actors, such as Turkey and Egypt, played an even bigger role in China's health diplomacy in the post-COVID era. Whereas Turkey became one of the first countries to order the Sinovac vaccine, Egypt signed an agreement with the PRC regime to become the regional production center for the same brand.

This study will examine the Chinese soft power in the Eastern Mediterranean by scrutinizing the vaccine-related news on Turkey, Lebanon, Egypt, Palestine, and Syria in China's official media. How did *Xinhua*, *China Daily*, *CGTN*, *Global Times* and *People's Daily* depict these countries to promote Chinese vaccines for worldwide audiences? Another related but difficult question to answer on the Chinese vaccine shots in the Eastern Mediterranean countries is about their local reception and soft power impact. The picture here is blurred at best. The Turkish case demonstrates, for instance, that Beijing had many hurdles to overcome (poor public relations, disorganized and unsatisfactory efficacy reports, late delivery etc.) throughout the entire process.

Keywords: Sinovac, Sinopharm, Chinese vaccine, Lebanon, Egypt, Turkey, Palestine, Syria

B

Melda AKOĞLU ŞİŞMAN, *Republic of Turkey Ministry of Trade*

"*A Comparative Analysis of Commercial Relations of East Mediterranean Countries with the EU and China*"

This study analyzes the commercial relations of East Mediterranean Countries (EMCs),[1] in regard to both their relations with the European Union (EU) and China, particularly after the introduction of "The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)" of the latter in 2013. For the BRI, many argue that China aims to establish new world governance in international relations, other than acting as a beneficiary of the prevailing system. Of the many goals of the initiative, ranging from economic aspects to security considerations, China seems simply to boost its exports, via strengthening its existing trade routes and establish new ones towards Asia, Europe, and Africa. In the comprehensive framework of the BRI, China has determined five trade routes of one of which is from Northwest China to the Persian Gulf and the Mediterranean Sea, passing through Central and West Asia. Consequently, the EMCs come to the front with their strategic geopolitical location providing an important destination for the promotion of Chinese trade as announced. Meanwhile, the EU has been a substantial trade partner for the region, as a part of the comprehensive and privileged partnership it has created with the launch of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership since 1995 (except for Turkey). Accordingly, within the frame of this initiative and the succeeding policies, trade relations between the EU and most of the EMCs have been managed at the bilateral level with the Association Agreements creating free trade areas. With Turkey, the relations have become more comprehensive and resulted in a customs union. This study aims to scrutinize whether the BRI has paved the way for China to strengthen its commercial ties with the EMCs or, the EU has preserved its leading role in the commercial relations of the region with the neoliberal trade policies it has been pursuing since the middle of 1980s.

Keywords: East Mediterranean Countries, The Belt and Road Initiative, The EU and Mediterranean region, Commercial Relations

[1] Turkey, Israel, Libya, Lebanon, Syrian Arab Republic, Egypt, Jordan together with Greece, and Cyprus. As Greece and Cyprus are EU members simultaneously, they are to be excluded from the EU total in the calculations.

Jiuzhou DUAN, *Tsinghua University*

"Strategic Synergy: Production Capacity Cooperation Between China and East Mediterranean Countries"

With the proposal of China's Belt and Road Initiative, both East Mediterranean countries and China recognized each other's important in their own development strategy. Thanks to the common interest and long-established working mechanism, China and East Mediterranean countries further upgrade their existing cooperation in various fields, especially in production capacity cooperation. The world is now witnessing the fourth manufacturing industry transfer. As a newly industrialized country, China is a potential investor and exporter to developing countries including East Mediterranean countries. Apart from the region's demand for industrial and technological upgrading, there are also strong market motivations for production capacity cooperation between China and East Mediterranean countries, such as complementary advantages in energy, capital, labor and geographical location. Previously, the traditional energy sector has served as the foundation of the productive cooperation between China and East Mediterranean countries, while automobile manufacturing, equipment manufacturing and new energy industry are becoming increasingly important in cooperation between the two parties, which also play a key role in East Mediterranean countries' economic transformation. Although many challenges exist in areas such as security, financial market and business environment, the bilateral cooperation remains solid and robust. It has begun to show a trend of expanding from the traditional industry to the productive service fields such as commercial retail, finance, IT and tourism.

Keywords: China, East Mediterranean, strategic synergy, Production Capacity Cooperation

Selim ÖTERBÜLBÜL, *Ankara University*

"China's Foreign Policy in the Eastern Mediterranean: Zone of Conflict or Zone of Cooperation?"

China has been standing aloof from the contested environment in the Eastern Mediterranean unlike the other permanent members of the United Nations Security Council. Considering China's peaceful rise narrative and the Belt and Road Initiative, economic relations have been regarded as the key factor in China's engagement with the region. However, the Eastern Mediterranean is not only China's main investment, trade, and market destination, but also has a strategic importance that could test Beijing's foreign policy principles. Even though the region is of great strategic value for great powers, the rising confrontation in the Eastern Mediterranean has advanced China's selective engagement and proactive involvement in regional affairs.

In this context, this study searches motivations behind the Chinese approach to the multi-faceted conflicts in the Eastern Mediterranean. It argues that Beijing's perception of the regional developments has a delicate balance in between opportunities as advancing its investments and threats as the Chinese workers in the midst of the Civil War in Libya were crystalized. Therefore, China's foreign policy towards the region explains in twofold parts to present whether the region has perceived as a zone of cooperation or a zone of conflict. First, the main pillars of China's foreign policy as non-interference, developmental cooperation, and multilateralism have to be revisited in understanding Beijing's strategic framework. Secondly, those countries in the Eastern Mediterranean have been in geopolitical tension over the delimitation of maritime zones besides their political confrontations, two ongoing civil wars, and refugee crisis. These factors make Beijing's entanglement in the region limited since Xi Jinping's self-promoted global role on development cooperation has its limits when it came to instability in the regional order and interference to strategic confrontations.

Keywords: China's foreign policy, the Sino-Middle East Relations, development cooperation

Ahmet Faruk IŞIK, *Shanghai International Studies University*

"50th Anniversary of Turkey-China Diplomatic Ties: Expectation and Feasibility"

This article focuses on contemporary Turkey-China Relations. 2021 marks the 50th anniversary of the first diplomatic relations between Turkey and China. I examine the topic from a diplomatic perspective; with a deep analysis of important events in the last 5 decades. This article employs a constructivist and realist approach to examine the past 50 years. It implements today's relations. The topic and constructivism theory shares the same history that since the end of the Cold War two countries' relations grows stronger, as constructivism theory does. In terms of political economy, 'Belt and Road'(BRI) as a biggest common platform is a constructivist initiative. Therefore, constructivism theory fulfils this research needs. As Hopf once said "Constructivism is agnostic about change in world politics." The author approached the issues from a realist perspective. Realist perspective interprets BRI and 'Middle Corridor' as a matter of increasing economic influence and soft power. The realist perspective helps research to enlighten some issues under this concept. This year will be a testing year for the bilateral relationship. From the first year to now, relations have been getting closer and Turkey is receiving plenty of Chinese Foreign Direct Investments (FDI). Especially, after the declaration of the BRI and Turkey's strong support of the initiative. Turkey combines its 'Middle Corridor' and 'Asia Anew' initiative with the BRI. Observing China from Turkey and observing Turkey from China are two different things. From the early years of the relations to now, Turkey sees China as an Economic power as China takes Turkey as a regional power and influential country. Additionally, this article focuses on the expectation and feasibility of bilateral ties. This article shows that the 50th years of history tell us that the next 50 years framework will evaluate into a larger structure. Turkey-China relations will extend while facing some internal and external challenges.

Keywords: Turkey-China Relations, Diplomatic Ties, Belt and Road, Middle Corridor, Asia

C

Degang SUN, *Fudan University*

"China's Party Diplomacy towards the Arab Countries"

The all-round cooperation between China and the Eastern Mediterranean Countries relies on various means such as government diplomacy, party diplomacy and public diplomacy. China's party diplomacy towards these countries is characterized by mechanism coordination, with the International Department of the CPC Central Committee as the main body, and the political parties, organizations, leaders, media and think tanks in the countries as the objects. China's party diplomacy includes the holding of dialogues between Chinese and the counterparts' political parties, signing memoranda of cooperation between political parties, holding workshops, and promoting mutual visits between party leaders and youth. China's party diplomacy towards the Eastern Mediterranean Countries is an integral part of her great power diplomacy with Chinese characteristics. It promotes the exchange of political mutual trust and governance experiences, and the "Belt and Road Initiative" and people-to-people exchanges. It has safeguarded China's sovereignty, security, and development interests, promoted the Eastern Mediterranean Countries' peace and development, and fostered China's soft power in the region.

Keywords: China-Eastern Mediterranean Relations; Party Diplomacy; Inter-Party Relations; the Eastern Mediterranean Countries

Cem YILMAZ, *Independent researcher*

"Egypt as the Gateway for China to Europe through Eastern Mediterranean"

"21st Century Maritime Silk Road (MSR)" –the sea component of the "Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)"– and Egypt's geostrategic position and policy preferences bring the two actors together on a wide range of policy issues, including trade, investment, finance and security. While Egypt is only one of a large number of actors that have joined the BRI, the fact that it hosts the Suez Canal –the busiest maritime route connecting Asia to Africa and Europe– makes Egypt an attractive actor for China. MSR and multilateral Chinese foreign policy represent the changing form of engagement with the region. Egypt, on the other hand, is the first Arab and African country to recognize People's Republic of China in 1956. Additionally, the actor is revered in the Arab world, the Middle East, and Africa. Thereby, the proximity of actors is not arbitrary. Additionally, Egypt urgently requires foreign investment and financing to develop its economy and views a rising Beijing as a critical partner in achieving its goals. The two raised their relationship to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in 2014. Chinese state-owned companies are involved in the development plans of Port Said, Port of Al-Adabiya and the Suez Canal. Beijing has an interest in strong ties with Cairo for providing the security of the MSR, since the route faces challenges such as Israel-Palestine conflict, the Cyprus question, and the maritime dispute between Turkey and Greece in the Eastern Mediterranean. China has so far worked in close collaboration with Eastern Mediterranean actors to promote regional security. This does not preclude Beijing from entering the region militarily, as evidenced by joint exercises with Egypt and Russia. Regarding the multifaceted nature of bilateral relations and the Eastern Mediterranean's challenges, opportunities and risks should be thoroughly examined.

Keywords: Eastern Mediterranean, Egypt, China, 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, Suez Canal

Ahmet ATEŞ and Anıl Çağlar ERKAN, *Iğdır University & Mehmet Akif University*

"*The Levant in Chinese Grand Strategy"*

Grand strategies are vital elements of formulation of long term foreign and security policies of the great powers. In other words, great powers mobilize all of available strategic tools and methods to achieve their regional and global political goals. China's recent initiative, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), sets a good example of implementation of great power's grand strategy. China, by enhancing its bilateral and multilateral economic and political relations with the countries in the BRI zone, aims to further its influence in the regional and global levels. An examination of Chinese action plans and strategic documents asserts that the Levant is one of the most important regions in Chinese policy formulations along with the Arctic. The importance of the Levant in China's grand strategy derives from its geostrategic location since the Levant is a regional connection hub for land and maritime transportation. Therefore, China has been heavily investing in the region in the last two decades such as its investment in Piraeus Port in Greece. Given the Levant's importance in China's grand strategy, this study evaluates Chinese investments in the region, particularly via national championships. Furthermore, it engages the Chinese strategy towards the region and evaluates Chinese expansion into the greater Mediterranean region.

Keywords: Levant, Grand Strategy, Belt and Road Initiative, China, Political Economy

Meysune YAŞAR, *İstanbul Medeniyet University*

"Maritime Security Regime in the Eastern Mediterranean: The Role of Chinese Navy towards Booth Model in Xi Jinping Era"

This study focuses on China's role in establishing a maritime security regime in the Eastern Mediterranean. It seeks answers to what the maritime security regime in the Eastern Mediterranean means for China and which themes China acts in the region. While the study focuses on the Xi Jinping period, analyses the maritime security regime using the Booth Model conceptualized by Ken Booth. With this aspect, the study, deals with the maritime security regime in the Eastern Mediterranean under the headings of diplomatic, policing, and military role within the framework of the Booth Model. In the study, which consists of three main parts, the first part touches on the maritime security regime in the Eastern Mediterranean and discusses what this regime means in terms of international law. The second part deals with the components of the maritime security regime as diplomatic, policing, and military role for China. While the study explains the diplomatic role with the themes of negotiation, manipulation, and prestige, the policing role is through the national structure and coast guard responsibility. The study, which deals with the military role with the concepts of balance of power functions and projection of force functions, discusses which of these three titles China focuses on in the third chapter. Overall, the study emphasizes that China acts on a military basis towards the maritime security regime in the region and tests this thesis towards the subjects of the balance of power functions and projection of force functions.

Keywords: Maritime Security Regime, Eastern Mediterranean, China, Diplomatic Role, Policing Role, Military Role

3rd Session

15:00 – 16:30 (UTC+3)
20: 00 – 21:30 (UTC +8)
13:00 – 14:30 (UTC+1)

Themed Session on "Russia and Eurasia"

Pavel SHLYKOV & Ekaterina KOLDUNOVA, *Moscow State University, Moscow State Institute of International Relations & Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia*

"Russia and China in the Eastern Mediterranean: on the Parallel Tracks?"

With the advancement of the Belt and Road Initiative China emerged as a new player in many regions, which previously lacked its presence. Among such regions was the Eastern Mediterranean, some countries of which, like Greece or Turkey, became a part of the BRI and Chinese global port and other infrastructure building ambitions. Russia, on the contrary, has long been present in the region, though its regional engagement during the Cold War, in the 1990s and 2000s varied depending on the geopolitical situation and Russian military strategic and economic capabilities.

For Russia, the Eastern Mediterranean currently is of strategic importance for geopolitical, geoeconomics and energy procurement reasons – and some of these reasons make this region significant for Chinese global aspirations as well. The Eastern Mediterranean remains a convenient area for power projection in the Middle East, Northern Africa and the Black Sea region. Geographic and geopolitical features of the Eastern Mediterranean make it an indispensable part of the European security system. Finally, the Eastern Mediterranean provides corridors for the trade and energy routes between Europe, Africa and the Persian Gulf.

However, with the rising militarization of the Eastern Mediterranean and increasingly active multiplayer presence in the region more concerns emerge about the patterns of Russian and Chinese involvement in the regional affairs.

Hence, the proposed paper seeks to answer the following questions. Has the region been witnessing a "budding alliance" of Russia and China in the Mediterranean or will the region generate a different pattern of Russia-Chinese interaction vis-à-vis other regions of their overlapping interests? Whether Russian and Chinese interests in the Eastern Mediterranean intersect or develop on the parallel tracks in a relative isolation one from each other? What is the reaction of the middle range regional players (like Turkey) and can rising Russian and Chinese presence accommodate them?

Keywords: Russia, China, Turkey, Eastern Mediterranean, BRI

Hasan Selim ÖZERTEM, *Independent researcher*

"*Russia's Power Projection in the Eastern Mediterranean: The Cases of Libya and Syria*"

Eastern Mediterranean has evolved into an arena of big power competition in the 2010s with the dramatic change in the status quo. Rise of Arab popular movements, the discovery of new hydrocarbon reserves and the US pivot to Asia created a new leeway for the big powers, including Russia. Having traditional relations in the region, during the Cold War, the Kremlin took the advantage of the shift in the status quo to re-engage into the region with an assertive foreign policy with its military, energy companies and other instruments. As in the Soviet period, the Kremlin's policies can be seen as a strategy to balance the West beyond its near abroad. However, rather than pursuing a uniform policy the Kremlin's policies are mainly shaped by the environment and the actors on the ground. In this regard, the limits of Russia's power projection can be seen in Libya, whereas in Syria it plays the roles of both a gatekeeper and a mediator before a regime change in Damascus. In this paper, using a comparative method, I will discuss Russia's foreign policy in the region from a Realist perspective. In contrast to other cases, following the popular movements, Syria and Libya experienced political turmoil that turned into an armed conflict. In both of these countries, Russia opted to pursue an active foreign policy to balance Western interests on the ground using hard power elements in cooperation with local actors. Such a strategy created a special form of relationship between Russia and the actors in the region, which brought Russia back into the politics of Eastern Mediterranean after the Cold War.

Keywords: Russian foreign policy, Realism, Eastern Mediterranean, Syria, Libya

Volkan ÖZDEMİR, *Başkent University*

"Geopolitical Economy of Turkey and its Interactions with Eurasian Powers"

In this paper, Turkey's recent relations with Eurasian powers (namely Russia and China) are examined together with the internal dynamics in the country. Geopolitical economy, which combines class and national perspectives I,e domestic political economy and foreign policy, is used as an analytical tool to address the subject. The question about where Turkey will position itself in the changing and now increasingly multipolar world order is an ongoing debate. This has been raised especially after the coup attempt of 15 July 2016; even Turkey's 70 years long positioning in Western Atlantic system has been interrogated. For some, Turkey has broken off the its status-quo in the Western system and tilled especially towards Russia with the procurement of S-400 missiles. However, despite the 'Eurasian' discourse and cooperation on some projects with both China and Russia, the paper argues that this does not reflect the reality: Under the current economic constraints and political conditions, Eurasian option has not been and could not be materialized by current Turkish government. Rather, the government has been interested in utilizing Eurasian discourse to gain bargaining power vis-à-vis the Atlantic powers and has not shown hesitation when taking critical decisions to satisfy its Western counterparts. This is a clear example for the policy choice of ruling elites who prioritize political survival over strategic national interests. Debate on Turkey's Blue Homeland (Mavi Vatan), which is the cornerstone of 21st century Turkish geopolitics, and developments related with Turkish maritime border issues such as Ankara's latest back off from its claims on Eastern Mediterranean and decreasing tensions with Greece should be interpreted under this framework.

Keywords: Geopolitical Economy, Turkey, Eurasia, Eastern Mediterranean, Blue Homeland

Mehmet BARDAKÇI, *İstanbul Aydın University*

"Geopolitics of Religion: The Russian Religious Soft Power in the Eastern Mediterranean"

During the Soviet era, religion was suppressed. Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the Russian leaders wanted to revive the new Russian state as a state of global stature. Utilizing religious diplomacy was one of the strategies to achieve this objective. In the 2000s, following the election of Vladimir Putin as president, Moscow gave the Russian Orthodox Church a prominent role in the state, realizing its unifying role in Russian society and its status as being an influential instrument in foreign policy. With these objectives in mind, the status of the Russian Orthodox Church was promoted to national leader. The use of the Russian Orthodox Church as a foreign policy instrument helped the revival of Tsarist Russia's role as the protector of the Orthodox Christian communities in the Eastern Mediterranean (the Levant), where most of the Orthodox Christians live. Putin's election in May 2012 as president gave another boost to the protection of the Christian communities as an objective of Russian foreign policy. Patriarch Kirill of Moscow played a significant part in the expansion of the Russian clout in the Eastern Mediterranean through the defence of Eastern Christianity. Russia also relied on such influential historical institutions as the Imperial Orthodox Palestine Society in the Holy Land (IPPO), which gained in importance in the past decade. Strengthening ties with the Orthodox Christian communities in the Eastern Mediterranean, such institutions helped promote Orthodox belief and disseminate the Russian language and culture. The objective of this paper is to investigate the expanding role of the Russian Orthodox Church in Russia's position in the Eastern Mediterranean. In this framework, the research questions are as follows: Which factors promoted an increasing role for the Russian Orthodox Church in Russia's policy in the Eastern Mediterranean? What role could the Russian Orthodox Church play in the Eastern Mediterranean in the future? How is this re-discovered diplomatic role of the Russian Orthodox Church received by the society at large and the political elite in particular in the Eastern Mediterranean?

Keywords: Russian Orthodox Church, the Levant, Vladimir Putin, foreign policy, religious diplomacy

4th Session

16:45 – 18:00 (UTC+3)
21:45 – 23:00 (UTC +8)
14: 45 – 16:00 (UTC +1)

Themed Session on "Foreign Policy"

Rajeev Ranjan CHATURVEDY & Defne GÖNENÇ, *Nalanda University and Yaşar University*

"*Indian Foreign Policy towards the East-Mediterranean in a Changing Regional Order*"

In a rapidly changing world order, the Eastern Mediterranean region is entangled with shifting alliances and power rivalries. Despite the region's exceptional vulnerability to climate change itself, the discovery of oil and gas in the region further provoked competition and enmities over natural resources. The context distorted by this rivalry is further disrupted by unexpected consequences of Arab Spring, severely rising youth unemployment, intensifying religious movements, cycles of violence, Syrian Civil War, Covid-19 pandemic, and depressing socio-economic conditions. The unprecedented changes in the region and beyond forced India to realign its foreign policy. Navigating the geopolitical and geo-economic turbulence in the region, India has been quite cautious in formulating her policies towards the Eastern Mediterranean. This article looks at key drivers shaping India's foreign policy towards the region under changing circumstances and discusses main trajectory of India's relations with the Eastern Mediterranean. Subsequently, India's relations with two of the partner countries, one in the South Mediterranean, Egypt, and one in the North Mediterranean, Greece, is examined. Guided by the tradition of middle path, Indian foreign policy towards the Eastern Mediterranean reflects its multipolar approach.

Keywords: India, Eastern Mediterranean, Greece, Egypt, foreign policy

Hatice ÇELİK, *Social Sciences University of Ankara*

"*South Korea's East Mediterranean Policy: A New Geopolitical Region?*"

South Korea has been trying to pursue a more multilateral and multidimensional foreign policy since the 1990s. Within this regard, it has been using different issues, methods and mechanisms both in neighbouring and remote regions. For instance, the official development assistance, educational cooperation and cultural collaboration are among the mechanisms for South Korea to deepen its relations with Southeast Asia region. On the other hand, energy trade and construction cooperation are among the issues for South Korea to establish and continue its relations with the Middle East countries. Besides those regions, East Mediterranean is one immediate region that has attracted the interest of the big powers alongside the regional powers. South Korea, through its national gas company KOGAS, has taken part in the exploratory drilling in the East Mediterranean. Taking into account the fact that South Korea is a state which is dependent on energy imports, the East Mediterranean political developments are requiring South Korea to involve. This study sheds light on the perspective of South Korea towards the Eastern Mediterranean politics. For this purpose, first of all, South Korea's perspective on the Cyprus issue, which is one of the major disputes in the Eastern Mediterranean, will be examined historically. Secondly, as a more recent issue, the developments in Libya and South Korean agenda for these developments will be reviewed. Lastly, the current South Korean government's discourse towards the Mediterranean region is examined. In a nutshell, it is intended to understand how the engagement of South Korea in the Eastern is achieved.

Keywords: South Korea, Eastern Mediterranean, energy politics.

Elif ÇETİN & Kohei IMAI, Yaşar University, *University of Cambridge & Japan External Trade Organization Institute of Developing Economies*

"*Japan's Shifting Policy Priorities in the MENA Region: Japanese-Turkish Relations as a Case Study*"

While Japan has traditionally pursued a low-key diplomatic profile in the MENA region, especially since the early 2000s and onwards, the country appears to be committed to strengthening its engagement with the region through increased diplomatic activity and trade relations (Miyagi 2006; Lamont 2021). This paper investigates the factors that have been shaping Japanese foreign policy priorities within the MENA by specifically concentrating on the country's relations with Turkey. Turkey constitutes one of the largest export markets for Japan in the Eastern Mediterranean region, and it is one of Japan's key diplomatic partners in the region. In addition, alongside the EU, Japan is currently one of the key providers of humanitarian aid to Turkey for Syrian refugees. The relations between Japan and Turkey are usually considered good and static (Nagaba 1997; Pehlivantürk 2019) and yet, this paper highlights that the relations between the two countries have had a tendency to fluctuate and evolve under the impact of certain domestic- and international-level factors.

This paper explores the shifts in Japanese-Turkish relations by concentrating on two specific policy areas: (1) trade; and (2) humanitarian aid. It examines how and why Japanese trade and humanitarian aid policies towards Turkey have been changing. Using a combination of both primary and secondary qualitative and quantitative data, the paper compares and contrasts the defining characteristics of Japanese trade and humanitarian aid policies towards Turkey during and after the Cold War era. It argues that while Japan projects its image as a benign, pacifist, trading state in the MENA region through its trade and aid policies, it competes with China and South Korea to establish itself as the key Asian power in the region, which is also reflected in the way Tokyo has been recalibrating its bilateral relations with Turkey.

Keywords: Japan, Turkey, foreign policy, humanitarian aid, refugees