*India’s interest in Mediterranean: Greece-Cyprus and turkey*

*Abstract*

Turkey has a major impact on the Mediterranean region, which is a hotbed of history, culture, and geopolitics. Turkey's location as a strategic link between Europe, Asia, and Africa shapes the dynamics of the region. But this influence is punctuated by tensions between Greece and Turkey, especially in relation to the Cyprus conflict. The geopolitical rivalries in the Eastern Mediterranean are highlighted by the Cyprus dispute, which has been exacerbated by territorial claims and rights to energy exploration. Greece and Cyprus are under threat from Turkey's assertive posture, which is frequently supported by military actions, which worries other countries and surrounding states. The conflict's resolution is still elusive, and its effects affect NATO alliances, European Union policies, and energy security in addition to regional stability.

In addition to promoting economic relations, India's cooperation with Greece and Cyprus is a calculated move to offset Turkey's influence in the Mediterranean. Greece and Cyprus are partners in trade and diplomacy with India because of their shared values of democracy and stability. Strengthened military and security alliances support stability in the region and offset Turkish assertiveness.

*Introduction*

India collectively wants to reinforce the 2500 years old relationship with Greece into a modern day political and strategical cooperation. India and Greece set up diplomatic relations in may 1950. The relationship has progressed smoothly over last 74 years. The constructive Greece-India diplomatic relation over past years laid the foundation towards bigger political, economic partnership. For example, in 1998 when India achieves nuclear deterrence unlike other European powers Greece supported India. Greek defence minister became the first NATO country member who visited India and signed a MoU on defence cooperation. On CAA, NRC, abrogation of article 370, reorganization of J&K, and Ladakh, judgement on Ram-mandir Greece shows a positive response and extend support to India for UNSC permanent seat. In exchange India constantly support Greece on Cyprus issue, issue on internal terrorism, defence cooperation and strengthen economic-strategic partnership.

*Economic-political Crisis in Greece*

India is currently the 5th largest economy of the world and plays a significant role in various international organisations like BRICS, UNO. In contrast with Greece. Greek economy is suffering from internal conflict, immigrants, terrorism, clash with EU and most importantly conflict with Turkey.

Fragile internal governance worsened during the 2009-2010 IMF and EU economic bailout, leading to strict control of the Greek economy and significant unemployment. Austerity programs imposed by the IMF met strong resistance in Greek society. Additionally, Greece's immigration policy, amidst a big refugee crisis and free movement in EU countries, compounded its problems. Greece seeks financial assistance from the EU to secure its borders due to the refugee problem, but the EU has not taken effective action. The refugee crisis and unstable economic governance force Greece to adopt a Fortress Europe policy.

Greece seeks strong ties to secure its national interests. Being members of both the EU and NATO, Greece's strategic options are limited, necessitating it to look for other powers to fulfil its interests. India fulfils most requirements and can solve economic and employment issues while enhancing defence capabilities. After Russia, Europe faces an energy crisis, and with bilateral ties with India, Greece can also address its energy problem with Russian gas.

Mediterranean Sea is not only a conflict prone zone between Greece and Turkey, but also a huge natural gas reserve present there. That's why this zone is militarised and dominant zone in international politics.

Cyprus is the main reason behind conflict between Greece and Turkey. Cyprus situated about 65 km south of Turkey and 770 km southeast of mainland Greece. Citizens of Cyprus known as Cypriots. Cypriots are primarily divided into two ethnic groups, 1) Greek Cypriots 2) Turkish Cypriots. Greek Cypriots are majority in population and orthodox Christian, and Turkish Cypriots are minority and mainly Muslim. It is believed that Greek Cypriots are the original habitants of Cyprus who came in Cyprus in 1200BCE, and Turkish Cypriots are descended of ottoman soldiers who conquered Cyprus in 1571. Before any further discussion, it's crucial to understand the political scenario of Greece, Greece is a member of both the NATO and the European Union. Greece aspires to form a virtual bridge between Europe, the new states of the Eastern Mediterranean, and the Gulf, with India as its easternmost core. Greece has good relations with countries such as France, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Cyprus, and others. On the other hand, Greece and Turkey have been in conflict over maritime borders and energy exploration rights in the Aegean Sea since the 1970s. Under the 'Blue Homeland Policy'. Turkey claims a significant portion of the Mediterranean Sea and challenges Greece's exclusive economic zone. This conflict puts India in a strategic position in the Mediterranean Sea. Today, Indian-Turkish relations have reached their lowest point due to Turkey's stance towards Kashmir and its support for Pakistan. In response, India has taken steps to counter Turkey, aligning with Armenia and Greece. Moreover. Turkey was a major arms supplier to Azerbaijan, countering India's arms exports. Lastly, to counter Indian military influence, Greece emerges as a key strategic partner.

Not only at the IMEC level but also at the military level, India and Greece have signed MOUS in defence. India and Greece support each other on mutual interests like freedom and openness in the Pacific and stability in the Pacific Ocean. In 2020, a defence agreement was signed for technology and intelligence sharing. In 2021, Dr. S Jaishankar visited Athens to strengthen bilateral ties, and in 2022, Greek Foreign Minister Nikos India’s visited New Delhi to enhance bilateral relations and strategic partnership. In 2024, the Greek government is considering selling the ports of Lavrio, Patras, and Alexandroupolis to India.

*Greece-Turkey relation*

Greece and Turkey have had a history full of conflicts. Greece gained independence in 1830 from ottoman empire and 1922 Greek army was defeated by Turks and Turkish republic was established. Greece claims over 10 nautical miles (15km) of airspace and EEZ opposing 6 nautical mile limit of UNCLOS. Greek territorial claim covered up to 43.5% of Aegean Sea, for turkey it would be 7.5%, this Greek influence on Aegean Sea can deprived turkeys influence and can hamper economic benefits from Aegean Sea. Thus, this is the reason behind of conflict between these two NATO members.

*But Why Greece?*

There is Several reasons that’s states, why India and Greece's relationship is reaching new heights. Greece faces some problems, including a turbulent relationship with the EU, an open economy heavily reliant on services and tourism, declining birth rates, and brain drain damaging Greek society. But its geographical advantage makes it very significant player in the Mediterranean region. For India Greece is the gateway to Europe. In 2023 India signed the IMEC (INDIA MIDDLEEAST ECONOMIC CORRIDOR) project. This project's succession is very much dependent on India and Greece's bilateral ties. With a good relationship with Greece India not only can solve the trade route problem but also can promote its 'Make in India defence equipment and pressurise Turkey.

Today most of the Indian trade is passing through SUEZ canal. Not only China's present in Djibouti can hinder the Indian interest, but also illegal-organisations like Somalia pirates, Houthis can create a challenge for Indian trade ships to go safely. Any conflict in middle East can disturb the economic flow and mainly to counter China's ambitious project measures, and actions are required. In this context, creating a comprehensive transportation network and sea route connecting India, the Middle East, and Europe is essential. In this project, one of the most important signatories is Greece, which can provide direct access to the Mediterranean Sea to Israel's Haifa port. In this way. India can completely bypass the Red Sea route for trade and achieve much more economic growth and influence through IMEC. In this project, Greece can be the effective partner that ensures India's Mediterranean ambition.

*India-Cyprus relation*

Republic of India and Republic of Cyprus (ROC) established diplomatic ties on 10 February 1962. Bilateral relations between both countries have been traditionally very close and friendly. India had supported the freedom struggle of ROC and thereafter has consistently endorsed the solution of the Cyprus issue, based on UNSC resolutions, international law and the EU acquis. republic of Cyprus supported India on crucial issues including India's election to UNSC, the India-US Civil Nuclear Agreement, the NSG and the IAEA and supported India post-Shakti series of nuclear tests, on the issues of Pulwama terrorist attack and Article 370.

*Conclusion*

We acknowledge, after much deliberation, that India's expansion and prosperity depend critically on gaining control over the Mediterranean area. Even still, we cannot ignore China's substantial economic impact in this region, which does not come only from military action. Along the projected Indian-Middle East Corridor (IMEC), China already has a stronghold. For example, the majority interest in Piraeus, the largest port in Eastern Europe, was sold to a Chinese business in 2016. Furthermore, commerce between China and the Arab world is expected to reach $106 billion USD in 2022, surpassing the financial ties between the US and Arab countries. Furthermore, China already owns twenty percent of Saudi Arabia's main port, Red Sea Gateway.

Numerous possible economic advantages are offered by IMEC, both domestically and globally. especially when it comes to lower transportation costs and more efficient freight shipments. But in order to accomplish these goals, the project's possible political roadblocks must be addressed. Since China has already established itself as a major player in the area, it is unclear if the US would be able to successfully offset it. Moreover, there are still urgent obstacles to overcome, such as the continuous hostilities like Tel Aviv's assault of Gaza, which makes it impossible for Arab nations to have talks with Israel, much less organize regional integration initiatives.