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Aristotle Tziampiris *Editors*

The New Eastern Mediterranean

Theory, Politics and States in a Volatile Era

 Springer

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Foreword

The Eastern Mediterranean is emerging as one of the most important regions for scholarship in current global affairs. The vast, newly discovered natural gas reserves in the region have the potential to reshape dynamics of the Eastern Mediterranean countries and far beyond. With declining gas supplies in the North Sea and Europe searching for new energy source prospects to decrease its energy dependence on Russia, the Eastern Mediterranean has been emboldened as the “region” making international headlines.

For academics, scholarship on the Eastern Mediterranean is arguably one of the most important contributions of current times, as the countries work to create a stable and prosperous region.

This book defines the “core” Eastern Mediterranean countries as Cyprus, Egypt, Greece, Israel, Lebanon, Libya, Syria, and Turkey. The current political landscape in these countries requires significant effort and goodwill to overcome a number of (mainly) political challenges. If one broadens the Eastern Mediterranean, then the potential to promote stronger regional cooperation is great—but so is the potential for further conflict.

The World Health Organization (WHO) identifies the following countries as the Eastern Mediterranean: Afghanistan, Bahrain, Cyprus, Djibouti, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, the Occupied Territories, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, the UAE, and Yemen Arab Republic. Considering these countries, there are even more daunting difficulties that the Eastern Mediterranean must face ahead.

Energy matters stand as the focal point for Eastern Mediterranean progress and conflict. The Eastern Mediterranean has the potential to be a major energy source for Europe, which could decrease the continent’s dependence on Russian and Algerian energy imports. Per the U.S. Geological Survey, there is an estimated 120 trillion cubic feet of natural gas in the Eastern Mediterranean. The race for drilling, pipeline routes, and export agreements has begun—and it is already a bumpy ride. In the end, fixed midstream assets and pipes will be the key to bringing newly discovered natural gas to the world energy markets.

Experts have reached notional consensus that a pipeline route north to Turkey via Cyprus is economically the most realistic possibility, regardless of the expansive mountainous terrain it must cover to connect it with the Trans-Anatolian Pipeline (TANAP) and the wider Southern Gas Corridor.

However, with Turkey's behavior as of late, serious political doubts have emerged. Up to the publication of this book, Turkey has threatened to use force against a drillship chartered by Italian oil giant Eni (operating in partnership with France) forcing the Saipem 12,000 drilling vessel to leave the area. A Turkish vessel rimmed a Greek coastguard boat off Imia, but fortunately no casualties were reported. The Cyprus government and the European Commission warned Turkey to refrain from any threat against Cyprus, calling Turkey's behavior "damaging for good neighborly relations and the peaceful settlement of disputes." Turkey denounced Cyprus's "unilateral" drilling that "undermined Turkish Cypriots inalienable rights on natural resources." The Italian government says it is monitoring the situation and that it would take "all possible diplomatic actions" to resolve the issue.

Cyprus President Nicos Anastasiades stated that Turkish action violated the international law, but that he will do all it takes to "avoid further escalation" of the crises. Turkish Cypriots are now calling for the settlement of rights to all 12 drilling plots before there are any political discussions on Cyprus unification. It is believed that Cyprus's offshore natural gas reserves rival that of Egypt's vast Zohr gas field. Earlier hopes that the Turkey pipeline route would help bring a political compromise to Cyprus unification talks look grim at this point. Nevertheless, the suggested pipeline via Turkey—whose domestic gas market has grown much more rapidly than Europe's demand—is more economically feasible than a longer, expensive undersea route.

In the absence of Turkish cooperation, Cyprus, Egypt, and Greece have opened the door for cooperation on energy matters. The three countries have signed an agreement for the creation of a new undersea electricity cable, the Euro-African Interconnector. This cable will link Cyprus to Egypt and Greece through Crete and will further establish Cyprus as a regional energy center. The cable between Cyprus and Egypt will connect to other African and Middle Eastern countries, and the cable between Cyprus and Greece will create a connection with European countries.

Egypt also has an opportunity to position itself as an important energy hub. The country has oil trade agreements signed with Jordan and Iraq. Exploration of the Zohr gas field has led to an immense surplus of supplies, which Egypt will export. Such a financial windfall will significantly help Egypt with the ongoing robust reforms that the government undertook, supported by the IMF, after ousting Morsi's destructive Muslim Brotherhood government. Recently, Egypt's Dolphinus Holdings and Israel's Delek Drilling (together with its US partner, Noble Energy) have signed a 15 billion dollar, 10-year deal to export gas from Israel to Egypt. Gas will be delivered from Israel's already operational offshore Tamar gas field; from late 2019, this will also include the offshore Leviathan gas field. Development on the Tamar gas field began last year, a \$3.75 billion investment.

Currently, Egypt and Cyprus are closing a deal where Cyprus will sell natural gas to Egypt's liquefied natural gas plants (LNG) from its offshore Aphrodite gas field that has around 4.5 trillion cubic feet of gas. It will likely go to Egypt's Damietta and Idku LNG plants, located about 400 miles south of Cyprus. Egypt and Cyprus, together with the European Union, will sign an agreement to build a Cyprus-to-Egypt gas pipeline, the EU being the main beneficiary.

This deal has brought tension between Israeli and Cypriot interests. Owners of the rights to Israel's Ishai—which borders the Aphrodite field—have asked the Israeli government to stop the Cyprus–Egypt deal. They claim that any extraction of gas on the Cypriot side would lead to extraction of gas from Ishai as well. The Israel government responded that “development of the reservoir necessitates agreement between the parties and safeguarding the rights of both countries.”

The Eastern Mediterranean therefore has two viable options to supply gas regionally: to build a pipeline connecting Israel, Cyprus, and southern Europe or to create a network of pipelines from Israel into Egypt where it could be liquefied and exported. However, Islamist militants in Sinai are posing a serious energy security risk. In 2015, the jihadi group Ansar Beit al-Maqdis, otherwise known as the “Champions of Jerusalem,” blew up the natural gas pipeline near el-Arish (the provincial capital of North Sinai) although they did not directly claim the responsibility. It will be up to Egypt's military to secure northern and central Sinai from the terrorist group.

Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, with his recently launched military operation “Comprehensive Operation Sinai 2018,” plans to reign in full control of the Sinai Desert, the Nile Delta, and the Western Desert. This operation was ordered after an attack on a Sinai mosque that killed more than 300 people, stunning the entire nation as the deadliest attack of its kind in Egypt. Building up a permanent military and civil presence in these areas can eliminate security risks.

The shared strategic interest in Sinai stability has enhanced security and military cooperation between Egypt and Israel and has extended important commercial cooperation. However, it will take serious effort to build upon these positive trends.

Meanwhile, tensions between Israel and Lebanon over offshore energy continue to rise in real time. The Lebanese government has announced oil and gas exploration tender in disputed territory on the countries' maritime border, encouraged by the discovery of vast sub-sea gas fields over the past decade. These findings include Israel's Leviathan and Tamar gas fields, which are located in waters near the disputed Israeli-Lebanese marine border. This long-standing dispute between Israel and Lebanon over 300 square miles of waters has triggered talks of another conflict between the two countries.

With ongoing Syrian and Lebanese hostilities toward Israel, a much more economically feasible Israel-to-Turkey pipeline through Lebanon and Syria is off the table.

Indeed, Israel faces immense pressure on many fronts. Hezbollah continues to provoke Israel from its Syrian and Lebanese border, inflicting psychological warfare in an attempt to affect Israeli public opinion and influence Israel's military mobilization in crisis. These provocations are best viewed as proxy to mounting

Israel–Iran belligerence. Iran’s positions in Syria, Yemen, and Qatar, coupled with its nuclear ambitions, have increased the strategic pressure upon Israel and enabled Tehran to pursue its revisionist agenda. Tehran’s rise and Jerusalem’s pressure could ensure Thucydides’ Trap in the region.

Just recently Italy, Cyprus, Israel, and Greece signed the provisional agreement to complete world’s longest sub-sea pipeline. However, many question its economic viability. In April of 2017, EU and Israeli officials expressed their support for the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Pipeline (EastMed) via Crete, which bypasses Turkey and avoids liquefaction. The EastMed pipeline will require a serious investment, with construction costs estimated to be 6.2 billion euros. But the EU must acknowledge current political realities in the region that elevate their own energy security risks; considering this, the EastMed pipeline may end up more profitable thanks to its low-risk profile than other possibilities. Investors will inevitably look for more gas findings in the area that justify long-term investment, given sufficient volumes.

It is hard to say which of these pipelines will be realized and which will not. For example, huge efforts were made to bring Nabucco pipeline to life (an investment of five billion Euros) but that ended up being an unfulfilled history. Given the myriad of disputes and hostilities, perhaps the best way forward to maximize the benefit of the Eastern Mediterranean’s newly discovered offshore gas can be summarized in Rex Tillerson’s words when he addressed the Israel–Lebanon maritime dispute during a recent trip to Beirut: “We’ve asked no one to give up anything. Rather, we’re looking for a solution.”

The authors within this publication address important issues useful to those involved or interested in the Eastern Mediterranean. In an easy-to-read manner, they walk through the region’s complex history, offering readers a clear perspective on issues related to sovereignty, consequences of the emergence and defeat of the Islamic State, the increasing important role of Cyprus, the destruction of cultural heritage sites in Syria, and other important political dynamics that overshadow regional economic cooperation.

My admiration goes to the book editors Prof. Dr. Aristotle Tziampiris and Prof. Dr. Spyridon Litsas for spearheading this volume which makes an important contribution to ongoing discussions on the Eastern Mediterranean. I would also like to thank Springer Publishing for bringing this volume to light that in no doubt will help all to learn more about this important, dynamic, troubling, and above all relevant part of the world.

Center for Transatlantic Relations SAIS, Johns Hopkins University,

Washington, DC, USA
March, 2018

Sasha Toperich

Preface

More than 3 years ago, it became apparent to us that the Eastern Mediterranean was about to undergo a process of rapid change and transformation. We thus decided to embark upon the systematic research of the region's international relations. When our first coedited book was published (*The Eastern Mediterranean in Transition*, 2015), the region's primary challenges revolved around the volatility produced by the Arab Spring and the potentially dire prospects of the Greek sovereign debt crisis. Today, the Eastern Mediterranean faces substantial multidimensional and even existential threats that engulf almost all aspects of foreign policy, diplomacy, the economy, and even public and social life.

Indeed, the Eastern Mediterranean is experiencing some of the most intriguing, worrisome, and dangerous events in contemporary international politics. They include the brutal civil war raging in Syria; the rise (and now apparent decline) of ISIS; the gradual unraveling of Libya that has become a divided, weak state flirting with becoming a failed one; the outbreak of Islamic sectarian conflicts throughout the region; the uncertainty about Egypt's future (and that of the Arab Spring more generally); the persistent regional ambitions (and rising authoritarianism) of Turkey; and, more recently, a refugee crisis involving millions that has affected not only regional states but also the domestic politics of several European states and quite possibly the very nature and future of European integration. In addition, the Eastern Mediterranean is becoming a big "laboratory" where balance of power policies among Great Powers and regional states are being tested.

As a result, the Eastern Mediterranean has demanded and captivated the interest of "heavy-weight" international actors, as well as of all the states that consider the Great Sea as a "lifeline" to their survival. This, in turn, has propelled a shift of interest from the conundrums of the Middle East to the complexities of the Eastern Mediterranean; possibly a *sui generis* phenomenon of a subregion functioning as a region within a wider systemic framework.

With this book we conclude a trilogy on the Eastern Mediterranean (our second volume was *Foreign Policy under Austerity*, 2016), yet by no means does it close the circle of analysis on the region that will be necessitated for the foreseeable future. After all, the Eastern Mediterranean represents a "venue" for high antagonisms,

complex conditions, and unresolved socio-political puzzles. They have evolved under a bright sun that from time to time appears to act either as an ancient god-avenger or as a soothing reminder that everything seems more promising under shining light.

We feel particularly pleased that in our marvelous journey in the blue, warm waters of the Eastern Mediterranean we had great co-travelers. As always, we feel grateful for the support and the inspiration deriving from our families. We would like to dedicate this book to our parents Nikos, Eleni, Konstantinos, and Olympia, who lived in this region for all their lives and contributed to the construction of the new Eastern Mediterranean in the best possible way that they could.

Thessaloniki, Greece
Piraeus, Greece
February 2018

Spyridon N. Litsas
Aristotle Tziampiris

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The New Eastern Mediterranean as a Regional Subsystem



Aristotle Tziampiris

The Concept of a Region

Regions are increasingly becoming more consequential to global politics¹:

Many of the most important economic, military, and diplomatic interactions take place at [the regional] level for the simple reason that proximity matters. Many countries that count for little at the global level ... have a much greater impact on their neighbors. At the same time, they are affected significantly by those same neighbors (Haas 2017, p. 151).

It may even be the case that today “there is no single global order but [only] diverse regional orders” (Khanna 2014, p. 36). From such a perspective, it can be claimed that “the most important piece of the liberal order ... is healthy regional orders ... If those regional orders fall apart, so will the global order” (Wright 2017, pp. 33–34). Thus, according to Henry Kissinger:

The contemporary quest for world order will require a coherent strategy to establish a concept of order within the various regions, and to relate these regional orders to one another (Kissinger 2014, p. 371).²

Despite their potential centrality to current developments, the possibility that the declared policy preferences of the President Donald Trump’s Administration may “accelera[te] the formation of regional groupings” (Freeman Jr. 2017), the

¹The prediction that absent the realities of the fast receding into the haze of history Cold War, “international relations will take on a more regionalized character” (Buzan et al. 1998, p. 9) is thus being confirmed. Global politics are currently also witnessing a new wave of regional organizations and initiatives (Kahler 2016).

²An extended and excellent analysis of how regional orders might fit into a more coherent whole in a manner possibly envisaged by Henry Kissinger can be found in Haas (2017, pp. 257–286). For a thoughtful exposition of the more recent developments in the international system see especially Litsas (2015).

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probability that they have “their own dynamic which is semi-autonomous” (Lobell 2009, p. 49) and are of great significance to the world’s less powerful states (Binder 1979, p. 379; Buzan and Waever 2003, pp. 41, 47), the International Relations (I.R.) academic study of regions has been (relatively) neglected, perhaps partly because of the rise of neorealism (Buzan et al. 1998, p. 11).³

The concept of regions is certainly encased in ambiguity and disagreement (Fawcett 1995, pp. 38–39; Lake and Morgan 1997b, p. 11; Nye Jr. 1968, p. vi; Russett 1967, p. 6; Thompson 1973, p. 96). There is simply no consensus about an international region’s proper magnitude, limits, characteristics, required level of cohesion or degree that it may constitute a mere social construct. (By contrast, a subsystem is a more straightforward concept, essentially “a component of a larger system with systemic properties of its own” [Thompson 1973, p. 9]).

The region of the Middle East, despite being ubiquitously referenced, provides an instructive example. The term itself was coined only in 1902 by Captain Alfred Thayer Mahan (Horden and Purcell 2000, p. 18). In a classic essay, Roderick H. Davison cautions in exasperation:

The fact remains that no one knows where the Middle East is, although many claim to know. Scholars and governments have produced reasoned definitions that are in hopeless disagreement. There is no accepted formula, and serious efforts to define the area vary by as much as three to four thousand miles east and west. There is not even an accepted core for the Middle East. Involved in the terminological chaos is of course the corollary question of how the Middle East relates to the Near East—or indeed whether the Near East still exists at all (Davison 1960).⁴

The possibly dynamic and volatile character of a region has even been applied more recently to Eastern Europe. The argument has been advanced that

Eastern Europe is disappearing. Not the physical place, but the idea. Whatever held the region together in the mind’s eye—a shared experience of occupation and exclusion, the permanent-seeming weight of economic backwardness, treasured memories of defeat—is gone, or at least not as present as it had been With its distinctiveness succumbing to the homogenizing forces of globalization and prosperity, Eastern Europe is in the process of being forgotten But then again, perhaps Eastern Europe never existed in the first place. Maybe it was only a fragment of the Cold War imagination. If the fall of the Iron Curtain removed the geopolitical rationale for studying the region, it also removed the main thing binding it together The truth is that Eastern Europe belongs less to the geography recorded in road atlases than to psychogeography (Mikanowski 2017).

Nevertheless, acknowledging the existence of disagreements and difficulties and even the necessity for a small degree of intellectual arbitrariness, does not excuse us from efforts to attempt to define regional subsystems. There are several advantages to delineating them. First, as was previously mentioned, regions are becoming a more useful analytical concept for the international relations of the twenty-first

³Notable exceptions include Binder (1979), Katzenstein (2005), Lake and Morgan (1997a), Paul (2012) and Thompson (1973). It may well be the case that more traditional realist approaches are better suited for regional analyses (Buzan and Waever 2003, p. 28).

⁴Davison also argues that “Near East, Middle East, Far East were all projections of European—particularly British—thinking” (Davison 1960).

century.⁵ Secondly, correctly identifying regions can permit decision-makers to pursue advantageous initiatives, especially since the world is simply too diverse for “one size fits all” policies like that of containment in the past. Furthermore, the possibility opens for the creative and productive cooperation among I.R. and area studies scholars (Thompson 1973, p. 91) in both theoretical and empirical endeavors. Finally, the concept of a region allows for more elegant and concentrated academic approaches. Not everything can or should be covered and analyzed. Similar to the role of a theory, which “indicates that some factors are more important than others” (Waltz 1979, p. 8), a properly defined region can help us determine us which issues to ignore and which issues to concentrate upon.⁶

Not surprisingly, attempts have been made to define the concept of a region. Already by the 1970s, as many as 21 different attributes had been identified in various definitions (Thompson 1973, p. 93). To provide an example of a more “narrow” effort, Joseph S. Nye argued that “an international region can be defined broadly as a limited number of states linked by a geographical relationship and by a degree of mutual interdependence” (Nye Jr. 1968, p. vii). A more expansive definition suggested that

the necessary and sufficient conditions for the regional subsystem are as follows:

- (1) The actors’ pattern of relations or interactions exhibit a particular degree of regularity and intensity to the extent that a change at one point in the subsystem affects other points.
- (2) The actors are generally proximate.
- (3) Internal and external observers and actors recognize the subsystem as a distinctive area or “theatre of operation”
- (4) The subsystem logically consists of at least and quite probably more actors (Thompson 1973, p. 101).

While taking into account previous scholarship, this essay will present and synthesize its own argument in favor of several major attributes and parameters whose confluence and description could produce the delineation of a regional subsystem. The first parameter is inevitably *geographical*. Regions cannot simply extend indefinitely: “Without some geographical limits the term “regionalism”[or region] becomes diffuse and unmanageable” (Fawcett 1995, p. 38). Nor can regions include an endless number of states without some proximity, though a further complication may be that geographical and political state boundaries do not necessarily coincide, many countries spanning more than one generally acknowledged geographical area. Inevitably, a region has to encompass a certain territory and specific states, even if questions are raised about both. It is also quite possible to define a wider regional subsystem but argue that it should be divided into two or more *sub-regions*. Perhaps it might prove easier to have some agreement on which states constitutes the *core* of

⁵ Barry Buzan and Ole Waever are absolutely correct in stressing that “since regions matter more in the current era, the costs of underrating them would be even higher” (Buzan and Waever 2003, p. 41).

⁶ It has even been argued that “as with nations, so regions can be seen as imagined communities which rest on mental maps whose lines highlight some features whilst ignoring others” (Fawcett 1995, p. 41).

a regional subsystem and less so on its outer borders. Without any debt, changes may occur through time with some states entering or exiting the supposed core. For example, if we consider Europe to be a region, no one will really deny a hard core comprised today of at least some countries such as Germany, France and Italy. But whether Turkey, Ukraine or Georgia are also part of Europe is, at the very least, controversial and subject to ferocious debates. In the final analysis, though, absent a geographic territory and states, no region is definable.

It should also be pointed out that given certain geographic and historical realities, it is not impossible nor uncommon for states to consider that they simultaneously belong and have an active role in more than one regions. For example, Greek people and diplomats can probably mount persuasive arguments about their country being (with relatively little overlap) part of both South Eastern Europe and the Eastern Mediterranean. Furthermore, and in some occasions in contrast to what regional actors consider to be the case, it is important whether outside actors consider a certain state to be part of a region. This is often linked to the geographic ambiguity that besets regions and especially their outer limits. For instance, whether Croatia is part of the subsystem of South Eastern Europe is often denied by many of the country's decision-makers but was widely accepted by the international community, especially during the crucial years of the 1990s and early 2000s.⁷

Secondly, regions have a *security* dimension:

While discussing this aspect, the possible existent of a Regional Security Complex—RSC (Buzan 1991; Buzan et al. 1998; Adamides and Christou 2015) should also be examined.⁸

In security terms, 'region' means that a distinct and significant subsystem of security relations exists among a set of states whose fate is that they have been locked into geographical proximity with each other (Buzan 1991, p. 188).

"Security complexes are regions as seen through the lens of security" (Buzan and Waever 2003, pp. 43–44). They operate at an intermediate level, not to be identified with the local or global (Buzan and Waever 2003, p. 27). RSCs are comprised by

a group of states whose primary security concerns link together sufficiently closely that their national securities cannot reasonably be considered apart from one another (Buzan 1983, p. 106) The principal factor defining a complex is usually a high level of threat/fear which is felt mutually among two or more major states. Unless they are world class powers, these states will usually be close neighbors (Buzan 1991, pp. 193–194).

They are essentially subsystems, "miniature anarchies" (Buzan et al. 1998, p. 13) that are based on "patterns of amity and enmity that are substantially confirmed within some particular geographical area" (Buzan 1991, p. 190). The definition of a regional security complex was eventually expanded to

⁷The author has had the opportunity to meet in the past in Athens with leading Croatian decision-makers and diplomats who rejected out of hand that theirs was a country that was part of the region of the Balkans, even when referred to more attractively as South Eastern Europe.

⁸For a significant attempt to describe, define and analyze regions based on RSC considerations, see Lake and Morgan (1997a).

a set of *units* whose major processes of securitization, desecuritization, or both are so inter-linked that their security problem cannot reasonably be analyzed or resolved apart from one another (Buzan et al. 1998, p. 201; emphasis added).

Third, the issue of the degree of a region's *cohesion* is of potential significance:

[Regional] cohesion can be understood in two senses; (i) when the region plays a defining role in the relations between the states (and other major actors) of that region and the rest of the world; and (ii) when the region forms the organizing basis for policy within the region across a range of issues (Fawcett 1995, p. 44).

This type of cohesion corresponds to a kind of *internal and external recognition* of a region—an observation that does indeed “appear to be the product of common sense” (Thompson 1973, p. 97). It is undoubtedly “politically significant when outsiders (again including both states and non-state actors) are forced to define their policies towards individual regional states in regionalist terms” (Fawcett 1995, p. 44).

A fourth parameter relates to a *common historical background*. Such a background does not necessarily have to be one of amity although if it exists it almost certainly leads to (often unacknowledged) cultural commonalities and affinities. It also creates common points of reference, helps explain patterns of cooperation or enmity and might even affect domestic structures or popular movements and ideologies. Common historical links over centuries (and sometimes even millennia), must simply not be ignored or underestimated but utilized in defining a region. For example, in a ground breaking essay arguing that the Middle East should be viewed as a subordinate international system, Leonard Binder pointed out that “with the exception of Iran, all parts of the Middle East proper—the Arab states, Israel, and modern Turkey—were once part of the Ottoman Empire” (Binder 1979, p. 387). This historical commonality is consequential on several levels:

The political boundaries which have been established in the area have little historical significance and frequently less ethnic validity. Moreover, these boundaries are often associated with imperialist intervention and consequently lack legitimacy Another consequence of the former political unity of the area is the case with which domestic politics may affect affairs in neighboring countries (Binder 1979, pp. 388–389).

A fifth parameter is the potential existence of extended economic relations that may even lead to *economic interdependence*. The existence of such a situation should always be investigated but one should caution that economic interdependence does not necessarily a region make. It may exist among states that have no common regional membership (China and the United States possibly offer an example); or it could be completely lacking in states that have undisputed regional ties. Israel and civil war torn Syria have minimal economic interdependence or formal relations but few would deny that they belong to the regional subsystem of the Middle East.

Finally, a region may enjoy *unique characteristics* that provide an important commonality to the counties that comprise it but may be completely irrelevant or absent in other regions. Hence, their possible existence must be meticulously investigated and described.

Thus, a region can be defined by the simultaneous existence of a geographical territory that might include sub-regions but must include a number of states in proximity, some of which may constitute the region's core; a security dimension that could include the existence of a Regional Security Complex; a degree of cohesion; internal and external recognition; a common historical background, possibly economic interdependence and perhaps some unique characteristics. Depending to what a degree a region fulfills the above criteria, it could be judged to be a “*strong*” or “*weak*” region.

Following this approach, this essay will argue that the Eastern Mediterranean should be viewed as a distinct regional subsystem. However, before presenting the rationale for our arguments concerning its eastern part, a discussion of the Mediterranean as a whole is required first.

The Region of the Mediterranean Sea

The Mediterranean Sea, despite its relative small size,⁹ has captured the world's imagination and has benefited in more recent decades from a number of magisterial and substantial studies (Abulafia 2011; Braudel 2000a, b, c, 2002; Broodbank 2013; Harris 2005; Horden and Purcell 2000; Norwich 2006). It was often the center of key historical events and Empires over the past three millennia. “It is now accepted ... that the study of [ancient] Greece [Egypt] and Rome has to take place within the context of a wider Mediterranean world” (Freeman 1966, p. 5).¹⁰ The Great Sea was “probably the most vigorous place of interaction between different societies on the face of this planet, and it has played a role in the history of human civilization that has far surpassed any other expanse of sea” (Abulafia 2011, p. 648). Encompassing both Eastern and Western influences and cultures in a potent, creative and sometimes clashing tension (Nocke 2009, p. xiv), the Mediterranean has often exuded a certain allure that seems to have intensified in more recent times.

In terms of its geographical boundaries, there is widespread agreement that as a region it certainly incorporates not a small number of states that include: Albania, Algeria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Cyprus, Egypt, France, Gibraltar, Greece, Israel, Italy, Lebanon, Libya, Malta, Monaco, Montenegro, Morocco, Slovenia, Spain, Syria, Tunisia and Turkey. To these one should probably add largely unrecognized state entities such as the self declared “Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus” (Dugard 2013, pp. 166–168), the “Islamic State” (Stern and Berger 2015) and Hamas-ruled Gaza (Levitt 2006). Furthermore, it has been argued that Jordan ought to be accepted as “an honorary Mediterranean” (Lerman 2016, p. 12). If this logic is accepted, then other nonlittoral states such as Bulgaria, Serbia, the Former

⁹The Mediterranean is actually 30 times smaller than the Indian Ocean (Crowley 2015, p. 51).

¹⁰For the importance of the Mediterranean in the Early, Middle and Late Bronze Age in connection to trade routes that likely played a role in the formation of identities and political rivalries, see Burns (2012, pp. 86–87).