

THE CABLE, THE CORRIDOR AND THE COSCO PROBLEM: GREECE, IMEC AND THE GEOPOLITICS OF INFRASTRUCTURAL POSITIONING

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Submitted: 21.05.2026 Accepted: 12.08.2026 Published: 25.08.2026

Issue: This article is part of the regular issue of JGPCD, Vol. 14 (1).

Abstract

This article reconstructs Greek foreign-policy behaviour across three interconnected infrastructural files of the post-2022 period: the India–Middle East–Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) announced at the G20 in September 2023, the GREGY subsea electricity interconnector with Egypt, and the East-to-Med data corridor associated with Saudi Arabia. Together with the suspended EastMed gas pipeline and the long-standing COSCO presence at the Port of Piraeus, these files map a coherent if contested Greek strategy. The article argues that Athens has pursued a strategy of competitive infrastructural positioning, in which the announcement, hosting and political sponsorship of subsea and overland connectivity projects function as a primary instrument of foreign policy rather than as its outcome. The strategy operates across three pillars - transport, energy and digital - and is constrained by three structural conditions: the COSCO presence at Piraeus, the rivalry with Turkey, and the post-October 2023 Eastern Mediterranean crisis. The contribution is conceptual: infrastructural positioning is proposed as a category analytically distinct from infrastructural power, connectivity diplomacy and middle-power forum work, and is specified through a set of observable empirical indicators.

Keywords

Greece; IMEC; submarine cables; infrastructure; connectivity geopolitics; Eastern Mediterranean; EastMed; Piraeus; middle-power diplomacy.

INTRODUCTION

As the New Delhi G20 summit drew to a close on September 9, 2023, eight parties; India, The United States, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, France, Germany, Italy, and the European Union, put their names to a Memorandum of Understanding launching the India-Middle East - Europe Economic Corridor establishing the India, Middle East, Europe Economic Corridor (MoU, 2023). Greece was not a signatory.¹ Within four months the Greek Prime Minister was addressing the Raisina Dialogue in New Delhi to underline the corridor's importance for Athens. Within a further year the Hellenic Ministry of Maritime Affairs was publicly pressing the Chinese state-owned operator of the Port of Piraeus to upgrade the port in anticipation of an IMEC-related role that no formal agreement guaranteed. By early 2026 Greek officials

¹The MoU signatories were India, the United States, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, France, Germany, Italy and the European Union (MoU, 2023). Jordan and Israel are transit nodes but not signatories. Greece was not a signatory and is not named in the MoU; its candidacy as a European terminus is a subsequent, and as yet undecided, political claim rather than a textual commitment of the corridor.

were describing the country, simultaneously, as a candidate IMEC European terminus, as the European landfall of an approximately €4 billion subsea electricity interconnector with Egypt, as the western terminus of a data corridor with Saudi Arabia, and as a partner in an Israeli Cypriot revival of the suspended EastMed gas pipeline.

The Greek diplomatic record of the post-2022 period is, in this respect, easy to caricature and difficult to interpret. To an unsympathetic reader it presents the spectacle of a small EU member state attaching itself, often with limited concrete commitment, to every available connectivity initiative in the Eastern Mediterranean. To a sympathetic reader it presents a state with a relatively thin diplomatic apparatus making intelligent use of an irreducible geographic position. Neither reading is satisfactory. The interpretative move advanced here is that Greek behaviour across these files is best understood not as opportunism, and not as straightforward middle-power activism, but as an instance of what the article terms competitive infrastructural positioning.

The article advances three connected arguments. First, the existing analytical vocabulary for the role of infrastructure in foreign policy - infrastructural power in the Mann tradition, connectivity diplomacy in the Khanna tradition, infrastructure studies in the Easterling and Larkin tradition, and middle-power forum work in the Cooper tradition - captures important dimensions of the Greek case but does not, in combination, capture what Athens is actually doing.²

Second, the Greek case calls for a specific concept. Competitive infrastructural positioning denotes the deliberate use of project announcement, hosting and political sponsorship as primary foreign-policy instruments by a middle state confronted with two or more incompatible regional infrastructural architectures. The concept is defined more precisely, and distinguished from its neighbours, in Section 2, where a set of empirical indicators is also proposed so that the strategy can be recognised in practice rather than asserted.

Third, the strategy operates in the Greek case under three structural constraints - the COSCO presence at Piraeus, the rivalry with Turkey, and the post-October 2023 Eastern Mediterranean crisis - whose interaction helps to explain an otherwise puzzling pattern: which projects have advanced, which have stalled, and which have been resurrected.

The article proceeds in seven sections. Section 2 sets out the theoretical framework, the gap in the literature, and the concept's empirical indicators, and includes a short note on sources and method. Section 3 reconstructs IMEC as the central file. Section 4 examines the GREY interconnector. Section 5 turns to the East-to-Med data corridor and the wider question of submarine fibre-optic infrastructure. Section 6 reads the EastMed pipeline as the strategy's most consequential failure and partial revival. Section 7 draws conclusions and indicates, more cautiously, the comparative implications.

FROM INFRASTRUCTURAL POWER TO INFRASTRUCTURAL POSITIONING

The argument builds on three lines of scholarship. The first is the literature on infrastructural power, originating in Mann's distinction between despotic and infrastructural power (Mann, 1984, 2012) and extended in recent work on its foreign-policy applications (Heibach and Taş, 2024). The second is the geographic and political-science literature on connectivity geopolitics, developed in different registers by Khanna (2016), Schindler and Kanai (2021) and the growing literature on the contest between the Belt and Road Initiative and competing initiatives (Russel and Berger, 2020; ECFR, 2025). The third is the anthropology and sociology of infrastructure, drawing on Easterling (2014), Larkin (2013), Anand, Gupta and Appel (2018) and Star's (1999) work on the analytical specificity of infrastructure as a category.

Each of these literatures captures something about the Greek case, but none captures it cleanly. The Mann tradition concerns the state's capacity to penetrate its own society through infrastructural means,

²On the relevant traditions, see Mann (1984, 2012) on infrastructural power; Easterling (2014) and Star (1999) on infrastructure studies; Khanna (2016) and Schindler and Kanai (2021) on connectivity geopolitics; and Carse (2014), Larkin (2013) and Anand, Gupta and Appel (2018) on the anthropology of infrastructure. The intersection of these literatures with foreign-policy analysis remains comparatively underdeveloped.

which is not the question raised by Greek behaviour at the EU–third-country interface. The connectivity-geopolitics literature tends to focus on the great-power architects of connectivity - China through the Belt and Road Initiative, the United States and partners through IMEC and the Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment - rather than on the smaller and middle states that host or refuse the resulting projects. The anthropology of infrastructure has produced rich case studies of particular installations but has, with some exceptions, not theorised the diplomatic register in which states announce and re-announce projects whose realisation remains uncertain.

What the Greek case requires is a distinct category. Competitive infrastructural positioning denotes a foreign-policy practice in which a middle state, confronted with two or more incompatible regional infrastructural architectures, uses the announcement, hosting and political sponsorship of connectivity projects as a primary instrument of diplomacy rather than as the outcome of a prior strategic decision. So defined, the concept is more than a relabelling of its neighbours, and it earns its place by explaining what they do not.

It differs from connectivity diplomacy in not assuming that the announcing state intends, or is able, to deliver the project as announced: the announcement and the resulting positioning are themselves the object of the practice, not merely the means to a built corridor. It differs from middle-power forum work (Cooper, Higgott and Nossal, 1993; Patience, 2014) in its material constraints: a middle power can convene a forum at low cost, but it cannot on its own build a 954-kilometre subsea cable, and the diplomatic value of announcing such a cable depends on the cooperation of other parties whose interests are not aligned with its own. And it differs from generic strategic positioning in two specific features: the structural condition of competition between architectures is treated as constitutive rather than incidental, and the practice operates simultaneously across several infrastructure types - transport, energy and digital - read as pillars of a single strategy rather than as separate files.

Two further features should be emphasised. First, the practice is constrained by external conditions over which the announcing state has limited control; in the Greek case these are the COSCO presence at Piraeus, the rivalry with Turkey, and the post-October 2023 regional crisis. Second, the practice produces diplomatic returns whose relationship to physical realisation is asymmetric: announcement reliably produces some return, while realisation produces a larger return but is uncertain and slow. It is this asymmetry, more than any single project, that the concept is designed to capture.

These features can be made operational. The following indicators specify what an observer should look for in order to recognise the strategy in practice, and to distinguish it from ordinary connectivity diplomacy or forum work:

Indicator	What it looks like in the Greek case
1. Sponsorship without capacity	The state lends high-level political sponsorship to projects it can neither finance nor build on its own (e.g. a 954 km subsea cable, a multi-billion-euro pipeline), so that the diplomatic act precedes, and is decoupled from, any material commitment.
2. Simultaneous and sometimes incompatible, attachments	Rather than committing to a single architecture, the state attaches itself to several at once - IMEC, GREGY, the data corridor, EastMed - some of which compete for the same role, funding, or partners.
3. Announcement-led, not delivered led	Diplomatic activity (summits, envoys, joint declarations, EU filings) is intense and continuous while physical progress is slow, contested or absent; the visible output is positioning, not infrastructure.
4. Returns that outlast the project	Bilateral upgrades, alliance formats, and EU funding decisions generated around a project persist after the project itself stalls or fails (most clearly with EastMed).
5. Host, not architect	The state presents itself as an indispensable landing point or terminus - a function of fixed geography - rather than as a designer or financier of the corridor.

The strategy is present, on this account, when several of these indicators co-occur: when diplomatic activity around a project is high while the state's own material contribution and commitment to delivery are low, when the same state sponsors competing or incompatible projects at once, and when the diplomatic returns survive the project's material fate. The remainder of the article applies these indicators to the four files in turn, and is careful, in each case, to separate what is documented from what is reported and what remains speculative.

A note on sources and method

The article reconstructs Greek behaviour from five kinds of source, used for different purposes and weighted accordingly. Primary documents - the IMEC Memorandum of Understanding (2023), the EastMed intergovernmental agreement of January 2020, European Union Projects of Common and Mutual Interest (PCI/PMI) listings, Connecting Europe Facility funding decisions, and the joint declarations of the Greece–Cyprus–Israel summits — establish the formal record of commitments and decisions. Speeches and official statements from Greek and partner-country officials serve as evidence of how the strategy is framed and what intentions lie behind it. Corporate and project-promoter announcements – from the Copelouzou Group / Elica and Saudi Telecom, among others – are drawn on to map the commercial structure involved, though always with the caveat that those making the announcements have their own stake in projecting momentum. Analytical grounding comes from policy reports produced by organisations such as the Atlantic Council and ECFR. Media coverage, for its part, is reserved mainly for developments too recent or too unresolved to have entered the formal record; wherever a claim depends solely on press reporting, or on a single outlet, that dependency is flagged explicitly in the text or accompanying notes. Because many of the developments discussed here are recent, politically sensitive and unresolved, the analysis throughout distinguishes confirmed facts from reported developments and from interpretation and treats 2025–2026 claims with corresponding caution.

IMEC AND THE GREEK BID FOR THE EUROPEAN TERMINUS

The India–Middle East–Europe Economic Corridor, announced at the New Delhi G20 on 9 September 2023, is the most consequential connectivity initiative of the post-2022 period. The corridor envisages two principal segments: a maritime link from the East between India and the Gulf, and a northern overland link from the Arabian Peninsula through Saudi Arabia and Jordan to Israel, with a final maritime leg from Haifa to one or more Mediterranean ports in Europe. The MoU committed signatories to develop transport, energy and digital infrastructure along the corridor; it did not designate a European terminus.

Two facts about IMEC's institutional form are important for the Greek case, and the argument depends on stating them precisely. First, the MoU is a declaration of intent rather than a treaty: as of early 2026 IMEC had no permanent secretariat, no binding implementation mechanism and no formal coordinating body, a gap repeatedly noted by analysts and flagged by the Atlantic Council as a priority for the 2026 G20 process (Shafer and Houssein, 2025). Second, and consequently, no formal decision has designated any European terminus. It is precisely the openness and under-institutionalisation of the corridor that Greece exploits: in the absence of an authoritative allocation of roles, candidacy can be asserted, sponsored and publicised, and the assertion itself yields diplomatic visibility. The argument of this section is therefore not that Greece has secured a role, but that it is using the corridor's indeterminacy to increase its diplomatic visibility.

Three European candidate ports have emerged: Marseille in France, Trieste in Italy, and Piraeus (with Thessaloniki) in Greece. Each has been promoted with characteristic instruments. France appointed a special envoy on IMEC in February 2024, the first signatory state to do so. Italy followed in 2025, pairing its appointment with a stated commitment to integrate Trieste and with a Trieste summit promoting the port as a strategic gateway (Shafer and Houssein, 2025).

Despite being the smallest of these states, Greece has assembled a distinct set of tools of its own: sustained high-level engagement - Prime Minister Mitsotaki's appearance at the Raisina Dialogue in February 2024 being one instance, followed by a series of bilateral summits with India and Israel; a concerted effort to present Piraeus as the natural eastern Mediterranean endpoint; and a deliberate

framing of GREGY and the data corridor as parallel files, offered as proof that Greece can support the corridor's energy and digital dimensions in addition to its transport function. The substantive case rests on three considerations: the scale of Piraeus, for over a decade the largest container port in the eastern Mediterranean; the deepening bilateral relationship with Israel since the IMEC announcement (GIS Reports, 2025); and the symmetrical development of GREGY and the data corridor, which would, if realised, allow Greece to host all three pillars. None of these, it should be stressed, amounts to a secured designation.

Against this stands one well-documented vulnerability: the COSCO presence at Piraeus. The Chinese state-owned shipping group acquired a 51 per cent stake in the Piraeus Port Authority in 2016 and raised it to 67 per cent in 2021, with the remainder held by the Hellenic state and minority shareholders. In January 2025 the US Department of Defense added COSCO to its list of companies it deems linked to the Chinese military,³ producing acute political pressure on Athens to demonstrate that the COSCO presence does not compromise the strategic suitability of Piraeus for an IMEC role. What characterises Greek conduct here structurally is a preference for managing the COSCO problem rather than resolving it outright: pressure on COSCO to invest in upgrade is allowed to build incrementally, while the state's continued minority stake is kept visible in public messaging – all pitched in a register calibrated so that Washington and Beijing can each interpret Athens' position favourably.

Greece's approach to IMEC, then, is best understood as a form of infrastructural positioning conducted, under real constraints: political commitment to the corridor voiced at the highest levels, GREGY and the data corridor deliberately marshalled together as proof of multi-pillar readiness, and the COSCO issue handled as an obstacle to be managed rather than one that forecloses the strategy entirely. The competition for the European terminus remains, at the time of writing, undecided, and the most plausible long-term outcome may be multiple-terminus designation rather than a single winner. The diplomatic returns to Greek positioning are nonetheless already substantial and accrue irrespective of which outcome eventually prevails - which is precisely the point.

THE GREGY INTERCONNECTOR AND THE ENERGY PILLAR

The GREGY subsea electricity interconnector is the most advanced of the Greek files. The idea originated with the Copelouzos Group back in 2008, lay dormant for over a decade, and was brought back to life in the wake of the 2022 energy crisis; Elica Interconnector, a subsidiary of Copelouzos, now leads development in partnership with the two countries' transmission system operators, IPTO/ADMIE on the Greek side and EETC on the Egyptian. The plan calls for a high-voltage direct-current cable running roughly 954 kilometres from Egypt's north-west coast to Attica on the Greek mainland, with a projected capacity of 3,000 megawatts and a price tag most often put at around €4 billion, though estimates diverge. The cable is designed to carry renewable electricity from a planned wind-and-solar portfolio in Egypt of around 9.5 gigawatts. It has been included in the European Union's sixth PCI/PMI list and in the Global Gateway framework, and received €9.6 million from the European Commission in January 2026 for preparatory studies under the Connecting Europe Facility (Ecofin Agency, 2026).

The analytical interest of GREGY lies in keeping four levels distinct, because they overlap in practice but are not identical. The first is the Greek state's strategy: the project has been positioned by the Minister of Environment and Energy as part of "Greece's broader strategy to develop new energy corridors to the North and the South" (Papastavrou, cited in CEEnergyNews, 2025), and the Egyptian President characterised it as a strategic step during a 2025 visit to Athens (cited in EnergyNews, 2025). The second is the private promoter: the project is, and remains, a commercial undertaking led by Copelouzos/Elica, with its own incentives to signal momentum. The third is Egyptian interest, organised around Egypt's ambition to become a renewable-energy exporter and hub. The fourth is EU energy policy, which supplies the PCI/PMI status, the Global Gateway label and CEF funding, and which aligns the project with

³In its January 2025 update to the list maintained under Section 1260H of the FY2021 National Defense Authorization Act, the US Department of Defense added COSCO to its register of "Chinese military companies." The listing carries no direct legal effect on COSCO's operation of Piraeus, but it constrains the political space for IMEC-related public investment in the port (Shafer and Houssein, 2025).

REPowerEU and the Clean Industrial Deal. What is striking in the official framing is its register: a commercial cable is presented as an instrument of state strategy. Thus, the interconnector is, in this register, not the consequence of the bilateral relationship but a medium of it - the analytically relevant point, regardless of whether the cable is ever laid.

Two further features deserve care. First, the project has, since 2024, been considered for an extension splitting the cable south of Crete to route capacity to both Attica and north-western Greece, the latter connecting through the existing Greece–Italy interconnection - a development that would convert a bilateral project into a regional one (EnergyPress, 2024b). Second, GREGY faces domestic competition from the GAP Interconnector, a smaller cable promoted by the Eunice Group and routed to Crete rather than Attica. It is tempting to read the coexistence of two promoters as a deliberate Greek tactic of keeping options open; the evidence does not support so strong a claim. At the PCI/PMI appraisal stage GAP was reported not to have secured letters of support from the Greek state, whereas GREGY received them.⁴ The more defensible reading is therefore narrower: the coexistence of competing private promoters creates opportunities for Greek positioning - Athens can engage publicly with a competitive field without being seen to pick a single national champion - but the state has in fact extended its backing asymmetrically to GREGY. The positioning advantage, then, is genuine, even if the notion of a deliberately cultivated rivalry is not.

GREGY's strategic worth accordingly splits into two parts. Should the project actually be built, it would position Greece as a meaningful transit hub for renewable power originating in North Africa, with the resulting capacity notionally split three ways - domestic consumption, re-export to other EU member states, and green-hydrogen production at home. But even short of realisation, the project generates an ongoing stream of bilateral contact, EU funding rounds, and intergovernmental signalling that functions as a foreign-policy asset in its own right. Thus, the asymmetry between the returns to announcement and the returns to realisation, identified in Section 2, is unusually visible here.

THE EAST-TO-MED DATA CORRIDOR AND THE GEOPOLITICS OF SUBMARINE CABLES

The East-to-Med data corridor, announced in 2022 amid deepening Greek Saudi ties around Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's visit to Athens, represents the digital pillar of the strategy. The project is a fibre-optic subsea-and-terrestrial system intended to link Saudi Arabia to Italy through Greece, promoted as a joint venture between Saudi Telecom's MENA Hub and the Greek satellite-applications firm TTSA, with Greece's Public Power Corporation among the parties. Some caution is warranted around the cost figures in circulation: no officially documented budget for the corridor has been firmly established in public sources, and the approximately US\$800 million figure appearing in 2026 coverage in fact pertains to an unrelated Saudi investment in Syria's telecommunications infrastructure rather than to this project. Functionally, the cable is meant to offer a route for data transit between South Asia, the Gulf, and Europe that bypasses the Suez Canal.

The corridor illuminates a broader transformation. The traditional cartography of submarine cables, organised around the Mediterranean and Red Sea chokepoints, has come under pressure since 2023: attacks on Red Sea shipping have produced repeated cable-damage events, including the severance of three Red Sea cables in 2024 that took months to repair, and the global fleet of cable-repair vessels is small and cannot operate safely in an active conflict zone (Rest of World, 2026). The result has been a wave of competing announcements designed to bypass the Red Sea by sea or by land. The most consequential recent development for the Greek file is the reported attempt by Saudi Arabia, disclosed by Middle East Eye in February 2026, to replace Israel with Syria as the corridor's terrestrial transit country.⁵ This is, at the

⁴The GAP (Greece Africa Power) Interconnector, promoted by the Eunice Group, is a separate Egypt–Greece subsea power cable, smaller in capacity (c. 2 GW) and routed to Crete rather than Attica. At the PCI/PMI appraisal stage GAP was reported not to have secured letters of support from the Greek state, whereas GREGY received them; the two are therefore not symmetrically backed competitors (EnergyPress, 2024a).

⁵The reported Syrian rerouting was an exclusive by Middle East Eye (2026) attributed to unnamed regional officials; it had not, at the time of writing, been formalised in the project's documentation, and project materials circulating in late 2025 still showed an Israeli transit. The claim should therefore be treated as reported rather than confirmed. The figure

time of writing, a reported and not a confirmed development; project materials circulating in late 2025 still showed an Israeli transit, and the rerouting had not been formalised. If confirmed, it would constitute a significant change in the project's structure and would place Athens in an awkward position between its Israeli security partnership and its Gulf economic ambitions.

A Greek diplomat described the country, in the announcement period, as the "eastern gateway to the EU for data transfer" (Euronews, 2022). The framing is characteristic of infrastructural positioning: the claim is not to particular volumes but to a structural role in the architecture of data movement, a role that retains diplomatic value irrespective of which specific cable is built.

The strategic significance for Greece extends beyond this single project. Greece has positioned itself through several initiatives that should be distinguished by type and maturity rather than aggregated. These include the Blue-Raman cable systems linking the central Mediterranean to the Gulf and beyond; a succession of hyperscaler commitments of varying kind - ranging from Microsoft's planned data-centre region for Greece to Amazon Web Services' Athens local zone and announced interest from other providers, which are not all "data centres" in the same sense; and proposed regional cable projects such as a GreenMed-type route through the central Mediterranean. The precision matters: a cloud region, a local zone, a connectivity node and a stand-alone data centre are different objects with different strategic weights, and the Greek digital footprint is better described as heterogeneous than as a uniform wave of investment.

Even so qualified, the cumulative effect is real. For the first time, Greece has a substantive presence in the political economy of digital infrastructure, a domain from which it was largely absent in the post-2008 period, and digital connectivity has become a medium of Greek bilateral relations with Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, India and Israel. Scholarship on submarine cables – running from Starosielski (2015) through to more recent work out of the Oxford Internet Institute (Lehdonvirta and Mikelsaar, 2025) – has tended to frame cable routing as something negotiated between states and corporations. What the Greek case contributes is an additional layer to this picture: diplomatic value from routing decisions does not flow solely to the corporate promoters and great powers whose companies own the cables, but also to smaller states whose geographic position happens to generate landing points. Greece, in this sense, functions less as a designer of digital infrastructure and more as a middle-tier state that converts fixed geography into a place at the negotiating table.

EASTMED: THE STRATEGY'S MOST CONSEQUENTIAL FAILURE

The EastMed gas pipeline is, on the argument advanced here, the most analytically important of the files, because it is the one in which the strategy most clearly produced a substantial diplomatic return while failing to produce the underlying project. The chronology is worth setting out carefully, since the diplomatic afterlife of the project is easily confused with its material history.

Development of the pipeline dates back to the early 2010s, undertaken by IGI Poseidon, a joint venture between Greece's DEPA and Italy's Edison. Under EU Regulation 347/2013 it earned designation as a Project of Common Interest, and Commission-funded studies backed it through the middle of that decade. Then, on 2 January 2020, Greece, Cyprus and Israel signed a trilateral intergovernmental agreement in Athens setting out plans for a pipeline of roughly 1,900 kilometres, running from the Levantine Basin via Cyprus and Crete to mainland Greece, at an estimated cost of €6-7 billion and with completion notionally targeted for 2025. The Israeli cabinet approved the accord in July 2020.

In January 2022 the United States conveyed an informal note (a non-paper) effectively withdrawing diplomatic support, citing the energy transition and environmental concerns, doubts about economic and commercial viability, and the risk of destabilising regional relations.⁶ Greece did not formally abandon the

of roughly US\$800 million that appears in 2026 reporting refers to STC's separate investment in Syrian telecommunications infrastructure and should not be conflated with the East-to-Med corridor's own budget.

⁶The US non-paper of January 2022 was widely reported, including by Greek media, as listing three grounds for the withdrawal of diplomatic support: the energy transition and environmental priorities; doubts about economic and

project, but it ceased to be an object of active diplomatic investment; stakeholders postponed an investment decision in 2024 and shifted attention to smaller interconnectors and existing infrastructure, and by 2025 the pipeline was widely described, even by sympathetic commentators, as effectively shelved (To Vima, 2025). The combination of high cost, US withdrawal, deep-water technical challenges and the EU's decarbonisation trajectory was decisive.

What is analytically significant is that EastMed produced substantial diplomatic returns during the period in which it was pursued, and that those returns have outlasted the project. The trilateral Greece–Cyprus–Israel format - inaugurated in Nicosia in January 2016 - was constructed in significant part around the EastMed file. It is often described as an annual summit, but this is inaccurate: the meetings have in fact occurred irregularly, and the tenth, convened in Jerusalem on 22 December 2025, represented the first leaders' meeting following the events of October 2023 (INSS, 2025; Government of Cyprus, 2025). That December 2025 declaration reaffirmed the parties' commitment to defence and energy cooperation and included a pledge to hold annual leaders' summits going forward. The associated "3+1" format with the United States, also built around the EastMed file, was reactivated at an energy ministerial in Greece in November 2025.

The case therefore supports the asymmetric-returns argument of Section 2. Announcement and political sponsorship produced the durable diplomatic infrastructure of the trilateral and 3+1 formats; realisation, which failed, would have produced an additional return that has not materialised but whose absence has not collapsed the diplomatic structure built around the announcement. The case is also instructive about the second structural constraint, the rivalry with Turkey. Ankara has consistently opposed EastMed, both bilaterally and through its exclusion from the East Mediterranean Gas Forum, and has used the project's suspension to demonstrate its own centrality to any eastern Mediterranean energy architecture. The Greek response has been to keep the EastMed file diplomatically active even when the underlying project is dormant — on the defensible logic that the returns to the file are not exhausted by its physical realisation.

The October 2023 Gaza war has reconfigured the file in ways still unfolding. The combination of Turkish trade measures against Israel in 2024 and the cooling of US support for Israeli energy infrastructure during the active conflict has, paradoxically, accompanied a partial revival of EastMed-related diplomacy at the rhetorical level, with discussion in the renewed 3+1 setting of a "new EastMed" configuration centred on smaller interconnectors, LNG terminals and Greek-routed export infrastructure. The underlying logic of competitive infrastructural positioning is, in this revised configuration, more visible than ever: the announcement and re-announcement of energy-connectivity infrastructure functions, irrespective of physical realisation, as a medium of the bilateral relationships that organise Greek policy in the region.

CONCLUSIONS AND COMPARATIVE IMPLICATIONS

Greek foreign policy across the four interconnected files of the post-2022 period — IMEC, GREGY, the East-to-Med data corridor and EastMed — is best understood as an instance of competitive infrastructural positioning. The strategy operates across transport, energy and digital pillars; produces diplomatic returns asymmetric to physical realisation; and is constrained by the COSCO presence at Piraeus, the rivalry with Turkey and the post-October 2023 crisis. It is neither connectivity diplomacy in the great-power sense nor middle-power forum work in the Cooper sense, but a third category, recognisable through the indicators set out in Section 2.

Three implications follow, stated here as a research agenda rather than as established findings. First, the category is not specific to Greece. It should, in principle, travel to other middle and regional states positioned on one or more of these architectures — Italy at the western terminus, Egypt and Cyprus on the energy and digital files, Jordan as an overland transit, and, with adjustment for scale, the Gulf states at the eastern end. Whether it does travel, and under what conditions the strategy becomes available and

commercial viability; and the risk of regional tensions (Bilirakis and Malliotakis, 2022). Technical and commercial obstacles were already significant before the reversal.

effective, is an empirical question for comparative work; the category clarifies what to look for rather than predicting success.

Second, the density of overlapping initiatives in the post-2022 Eastern Mediterranean — IMEC, competing subsea interconnectors, multiple fibre-optic corridors, the residual EastMed configuration, the Turkish-favoured Development Road, and the established Belt and Road presence through Piraeus — is itself a structural condition. It creates openings for middle-state positioning that did not exist under single-architecture dominance. Competitive infrastructural positioning is, in this sense, partly a function of infrastructural multipolarity.

Third, and most generally, the literature on infrastructure in international relations has organised its attention either at the level of great-power architects or at the level of specific installations. The intermediate level — the middle state that hosts, refuses or partially absorbs such initiatives — remains comparatively under-theorised. The Greek case is a clear instance of that level. Greece has built none of the major infrastructure under examination; the states and institutions behind IMEC, the data corridor and the abandoned EastMed pipeline are India, the United States, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Israel and the European Union. Yet the diplomatic dividends — measured in bilateral relationships, EU funding flows and the consolidation of alliance formats — have accrued disproportionately to Athens. The explanation lies less in any Greek capacity to deliver projects than in the disciplined use of a fixed geographic position through which these architectures must, by necessity, pass. Greece's role has not been to build the routes, but to occupy the crossing.

DECLARATIONS

Acknowledgements

The author wishes to thank the anonymous reviewers and the editorial team for their constructive and detailed feedback, which substantially improved the quality of the manuscript.

Funding

The author received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Author Contributions

The author confirms sole responsibility for all aspects of this research, including conceptualisation, data collection, analysis, and manuscript preparation. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Competing Interests

The author declares no competing interests.

Ethical Approval

Not applicable.

Informed Consent

Not applicable.

Data Availability

No new datasets were created or analysed.

Use of Generative AI

Not applicable.

Publisher's Note

The Journal of Global Politics and Current Diplomacy remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations. The Centre for European Dialogue and Cultural Diplomacy (DEDiC) is not responsible for the views expressed herein.

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