

Euro-Mediterranean, Regional Security Challenges: “How Defining Maritime Boundaries Would Bolster Stability”



ATHENS, Greece: Steps to define maritime borders between Lebanon and Israel would help stability throughout the East Mediterranean region, a leading energy expert told a key

industry conference in Athens on Monday.

“In the past, borders were defined by wars; nowadays, with the UN and UNCLOS [or United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea], all Maritime differences can be resolved peacefully,” Roudi Baroudi, a 40-year industry veteran, told the Athens Energy Forum. “With modern science and advanced imagery, new technologies give us unprecedented opportunities to reach our goals for Maritime Boundaries with a diplomatic/legal approach.” Baroudi pointed out also that the Mediterranean countries have 95 Actual Maritime Boundaries out of which 31 only Treaties and 64 are unresolved.

Baroudi, who serves as CEO of Energy and Environment Holding, an independent consultancy based in Doha, spoke on the opening day of the two-day Athens Energy Forum (AEF) at the Grand Hyatt Athens hotel.

“With a multi-disciplinary approach – a mixture of law and science – we can get to fair and just Maritime partitioning without going to war,” he told the audience. “If we review the region’s current offshore oil and gas concession blocks, we quickly determine how these blocks are impacting certain un-demarcated Maritime Boundaries, and this is where the best law and the best science can give all countries a fair share.”

Speaking on the sidelines of the event, Baroudi said a diplomatic resolution of the Lebanese-Israeli maritime dispute and other maritime borders disputes between Cyprus, Turkey and Greece would have positive impacts across the region.

“This would send all the right signals to everyone with a stake in the East Med, from governments and their peoples to major energy companies and other investors,” he said.

“It would demonstrate by example – even more than last year’s landmark five-nation Caspian Sea deal – that even the most intractable disputes can be sidestepped if the principals are willing to be reasonable.”

Baroudi has advised companies and governments on several continents about how to approach energy issues, and has helped to formulate policy for key agencies of the European Union and the United Nations. He said any form understanding, direct or not, that allows both Lebanon and Israel to focus on developing their resources would confer significant benefits on the entire region.

“Even for countries not currently on the verge of becoming energy producers, the removal of a key source of friction between Israel and Lebanon would cast regional security in a more positive light, lowering the risk profiles of all business, trade, and investment activities,” he added. “And this is not to mention all the advantages that the Lebanon and Israel would gain from new revenues. Israel would make its own choices, of course, but Lebanon would have much more capacity to address pressing national objectives in terms of debt retirement, deficit reduction, health and education spending, and infrastructure development. Best of all, all of these measures would help alleviate poverty, another major source of local and regional instability.”

By all accounts, Baroudi’s remarks were delivered in the right room. As in previous years, the AEF attracted numerous executives and other key decision-makers from the private and public sectors like, including Greek Energy Minister George Stathakis.

“Of course it’s important to keep reminding the Lebanese and Israeli governments that if they want to exploit their respective energy resources to the fullest, the surest way forward is some kind of peaceful one. It may not even matter what route they take, just so long as they avoid armed conflict and the all the costs that would come with it,” he said on the sidelines of the forum. “But we also need to make sure that other players in the region realize that this matters for them as well: after all, if even an informal understanding on offshore resources can be reached between two

of the world's most mutually hostile neighbors, it would demonstrate that other rivalries also can be partially overcome for mutual benefit."

This, Baroudi argued, would "bolster regional stability by encouraging other sets of Mediterranean neighbors – especially Cyprus and Turkey – to commit to peaceful means of dispute resolution".