

**Forum:** Security Council (SC)

**Issue:** Analysing the Maritime Dispute Between Turkey and Greece in the Eastern Mediterranean

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## **Introduction:**

The Eastern Mediterranean has been known for its geopolitical significance and has become a main interest for the two nations, Turkey and Greece. This issue revolves around the nation's claims over the Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ) and the resources that are in the region of mainly, the Aegean Sea. Many countries, such as Cyprus have also played a part in these claims, causing a greater tension between several countries. This controversy has caused Turkey to take action by drilling in contested waters, which have been previously claimed by Greece and the European Union (EU).

This maritime dispute can be traced back to World War II, where over the years, both nations have attempted to claim and exploit the region's natural resources, causing international disputes and environmental damage as well. The chaos over the competition for control amplifies the significance of this issue, and the increasing global demand for those resources. These 3 main issues namely, multiple claims, historical relevance and the presence of valuable energy resources (such as hydrocarbon reserves) are what cause a great imbalance and the need for this issue to be resolved.

The Eastern Mediterranean also serves as a jackpot for energy exploration, with countless reserves of natural gas beneath the seabed, extending conflict region-wide. This issue also comes from the delineation, or the exact position of maritime boundaries and the different sovereignty issues over the islands in the Eastern Mediterranean. The potential disruption of energy supply and regional security is a major concern if nations continue to dispute over the border lines, as it has not only increased tension between Turkey and Greece but other NATO members as well.

The situation has been constantly changing through various incidents, manoeuvres and negotiations between nations, attempting to find a diplomatic solution.

### Definition of Key Terms:

1. **Maritime:** connected with ships or the sea, or being near the sea.
2. **Exclusive Economic Zone:** an area of coastal water and seabed within a certain distance of a country's coastline, to which the country claims exclusive rights for fishing, drilling, and other economic activities.
3. **Aegean Sea:** Elongated embayment of the Mediterranean Sea between Europe and Asia, covering an area of ~215,000 square kilometers.
4. **Sovereignty:** the power of a country to independently control its own government and actions.
5. **De-escalation:** to (cause to) become less dangerous or difficult.

## Background Information

### Historical Context

Turkey and Greece both have interests in the Aegean Sea dispute, involving their rights, security and economic interests. The Lausanne Peace Treaty, established in 1923, was over the political balance between both nations. Turkey had fully respected the treaty, wanting Greece to do the same. The thinking of this treaty was to grant coastal states limited areas of maritime jurisdiction and leave the rest of it to Turkey and Greece, based on the following principles:

- The Aegean (Eastern Mediterranean area) sea is common between Turkey and Greece
- The high seas and air space above it should not be impaired and all nations can enjoy the benefits
- Acquisition of new maritime areas should be based on mutual consent and should be fair

The main dispute is based on regarding the entire Aegean as a Greek sea in disregard of Turkey's rights over the coastal areas. The threat of extending Greek territorial waters beyond their present width of 6 miles and the militarization of the Eastern Aegean Islands can be

counted among these efforts which are the main underlying causes.

The Continental Shelf dispute is another one of these differences, concerning the areas to be given to Turkey and Greece beyond the 6 mile territorial sea. Turkey has shown interest in engaging with discussion with Greece to find a good settlement to be of best interest to both nations. Greece on the other hand, has made it's way to the UN Security Council (UNSC) and the International Court of Justice (ICJ) to discuss the following:

- UNSC called for Turkey and Greece to reduce tensions in the Aegean and asked them to resume negotiations over their differences to ensure that they find acceptable solutions
- The ICJ in its ruling determined the Aegean continental shelf beyond the territorial waters as "areas in dispute" with respect to which both Turkey and Greece's claim of rights.

Turkey and Greece signed the 1976 Bern Agreement, stating that the two governments have the obligation to refrain from any action related to the Aegean continental shelf. This was followed by both countries over several years and thus it was possible to avert the dispute. However Greece, who terminated the negotiating process with Turkey, started seismic activities and drilling operations in the disputed areas of the Aegean continental shelf in 1981. These were open violations of the agreement and have formed the main cause of the crisis between Turkey and Greece.

**Timeline**

<i>Date</i>	<i>Event</i>
1913	Treaty of Athens between the Ottoman Empire and Kingdom of Greece was signed which ended all forms of dispute between them after the Balkan War and many other islands
1947	Creation of the Truman Doctrine (by US government), which worried over if the Soviet Union gained control over the region of sea, it could restrict oil flow. He gave \$400 million in aid to Greece and Turkey as well.
1973	Turkey has been investigating over the legal status of the Aegean Sea in attempts of exploration carried out by the Turkish Petroleum Corporation in 1976 and 1987, bringing these countries close to war, as Turkey began the invasion of



	Cyprus as well during that time.
1988	The Aegean dispute increases in concern with naval incidents and airspace violations, mainly around far off islands
1994	Greece ratifies the UNCLOS, giving them the right to establish their territorial waters, and the Turkish government authorised the right for Turkey to use any measures if Greece changes.
1996	The Imia crisis begin after Turkey suggested the idea of “grey zones” which was the claim that the sovereignty of a number of islands is undetermined, bringing them almost to war.
2020	Turkey and Greece sign an agreement in Cairo partially delimitating their EEZs in the Eastern Mediterranean.
2021	Diplomatic talks begin as the issue of climate change starts to arise and border disputes have began to occur again, with nations attempting to explore various peaceful ways to resolve the issue.

## Current Situation

### Introduction

Following the fall of the Ottoman Empire, the borders of Greece and Turkey were established through international treaties and agreements. However, the status of many Aegean islands was not decided, resulting in disagreements between the two countries over ownership and control of these islands. Greece claims that any island over which Athens has sovereignty means that no other nation can have military, political, or economic control/influence, leading Turkey to fight for the demilitarisation of Greek activity on some Aegean islands. Turkey believes Greece is using the small islands to expand its maritime border and conduct economic or military activities in what they claim to be, Turkish waters.

### Territorial waters, air spaces and demilitarization

Using the current 6 mile rule, Greece territory holds around 43.5% of the Aegean Sea, while Turkey holds only 7.5%, the remaining being high seas. If the breadth of Greek waters was extended to 12 miles due to the existence of islands, that percentage would reach to around 71.5, while Turkey’s would only be 8.8%. The impact of this extension falls mainly on the rights of

Turkey to the high seas, losing any economic and scientific benefits, making any increase beyond 6 miles completely opposed by Turkey.

Due to the security requirements of Turkey, the status of Eastern Aegean Islands have been essential ever since they were placed under the sovereignty of Greece. The Athens decision in 1914 pushed for the demilitarization and then islands being turned over to Greece.

The Treaty of Paris (1947) aimed to reconcile Greek sovereignty over these island stating that “these islands shall be and shall remain demilitarized”, however, Greece has been violating this and has admitted to military presence on some of these islands since 1970s. Turkey has raised the issue of illegal military activities and protested against these violations.

### **Conflicting claims and legal framework**

Regardless of international treaties, there are still many small islands in the Aegean sea that lack any ownership. Greece has attempted to change their status by opening features to show settlement, as far as enacting laws and regulations. Turkey regards this new attempt as another way to close-off the Aegean sea as Greek waters.

Recently, the dispute over the Kardak rocks (3.8 nautical miles off the Turkish coast) have for years, hosted Turkish fisherman engaging in activities around these rocks without any hindrance, however the mayor of a Greek island (Kalimnos) which is 5.5 nautical miles away, came to the rocks and raised the Greek flag, resulting in the Turks to hoist their flag the next day.

Greece had tried to base their sovereignty over the Kardak rocks and others on:

- 4 January 1932 and 28 December 1932 Turkish-Italian documents. A reference was made to the Kardak Rocks in the 28 December 1932 document, however, legal procedures were not completed.
- Article 18 of the Covenant of the League of Nations stating that "Every Treaty or International Engagement entered into hereinafter by any Member of the League shall be forthwith registered with the Secretariat and shall as soon as possible be published by it. No such Treaty or International Engagement shall be binding until so registered."

Various treaties have shown a direct link between islands and their demilitarized status, having been violated by Greece. Article 14 of the 1947 Paris Peace Treaty states the following:

- "Italy hereby cedes to Greece in full sovereignty the Dodacanese Islands indicated hereafter, namely Stampalia (Astropalia), Rhodes (Rhodos), Calki (Kharki), Scarpanto, Casos (Casso), Piscopis (Tilos), Misiros (Niyros), Calimnos (Kalymnos), Leros, Patmos, Lipsos (Lipso), Simi (Symi), Cos (Kos) and Castellorizo, as well as the adjacent islets.
- "These islands shall be and shall remain demilitarized."

### **Attempts for peace**

A settlement on the Aegean issues will only be lasting if it is built on the interests of both nations and they adhere to it. In 1996, the Turkish government launched an initiative concerning Turkish-Greek relations, having four dimensions:

- Doesn't exclude any methods for peaceful solutions for the problems in the Aegean, foreseeing a comprehensive resolution process
- Proposes a political framework, achieved in the form of a political document to be finalized by the two countries or through an agreement
- Puts forward a security framework to be placed between the two countries related to military activities.
- Code of conduct to be followed by the two sides, so that both nations avoid actions that could increase tension.

## **Major Parties Involved and Their Views**

### **Greece**

Greece has strong connections to the Eastern Mediterranean, emphasizing their rights under international law, specifically UNCLOS, keeping the maritime boundaries important to their economic interests and national security. As an EU nation, they have stronger power compared to Turkey over these disputes, however, the nation's stability impacts the EU policies and decisions, making it crucial for peace in the region.

Greece revolves around the EEZs, showing the importance of sovereign rights, linking back to the Imia crisis, which showed their commitment to safeguard marine interests. The EU's support for Greece emphasizes the rule of international law as a base for resolving disputes.

### **Turkey**

Turkey, another stakeholder opposing Greece attempts for the delineation of EEZs, and the exploration of hydrocarbon resources beneath the seabed. The existing maritime boundaries have limited its access to the Eastern Mediterranean's resources, and various historical treaties are considered by Turkey as unfavorable conditions that act against its rights. This perspective aligns with their Blue Homeland policy, mentioning broader attempts to assert control over maritime zones it seems necessary.

Turkey's actions have caused tension in diplomatic ties with Greece, Cyprus, and the European Union. Turkey's alliance with Russia, through missile defense systems, adds another influence and the possible issues over Turkey and NATO.

### **Cyprus**

The citizens living in coastal regions of Turkey, Greece, and Cyprus are significantly affected by the maritime dispute. Cyprus, and the self-declared Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, plays an important role in the maritime disputes. Cyprus places its sovereign rights over EEZs and resources, as any other nation does as well.

However, the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, recognized solely by Turkey, challenges these claims, advocating for a fair distribution of resources, impacting the resolution of maritime conflicts not only between separate nations, but internally as well.

### **United States of America**

The United States has to manage their decisions carefully, being allied with both Turkey and Greece. While advocating for de-escalation and supporting diplomatic solutions, the US recognizes Turkey's view and hopes to maintain partnership in the region. The US engages in initiatives to facilitate talks between both parties, to prevent escalation and maintain stability in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Although not a major role, the alliances with the nations and the power of the US holds great importance as it may cause international tensions if they US was to side with one nation and not another.

### **European Union**

The European Union, although not a direct influence, holds a stake in regional stability. The EU's emphasizes international law, specifically UNCLOS, and supports Greece and Cyprus

in their claims (being EU nations, unlike Turkey). Sanctions placed by the EU show their commitment to upholding the rule of law. The EU plays a significant role in influencing war and mining in the Eastern Mediterranean, as any action made by the member states there, can also influence the decision and policies of the EU.

## UN Involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

- United Nations Security Council Resolution 395, August 25th 1976 (**S/RES/395**)
  - o This resolution urged Turkey and Greece to do everything possible to de-escalate tensions in the Aegean and urged them to resume direct talks to resolve their differences. Also urged Turkey and Greece to ensure that these negotiations end in mutually satisfactory solutions.
- United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, December 10th 1982
  - o The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) is an international agreement that establishes a legal framework for all marine and maritime activities. Currently, 168 countries and the European Union are parties to UNCLOS which defines the rights and responsibilities of nations in their use of the world's oceans. It establishes guidelines for businesses, the environment, and the management of marine natural resources, laying down a comprehensive regime of law and order in the world's oceans and seas, establishing rules governing all uses of the oceans and their resources.

## Possible Solutions

Below are a list of possible solutions delegates can consider writing clauses around, pertaining to the maritime dispute between Greece and Turkey:

First, delegates can look towards international legal mechanisms such as the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and/or the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) to hand out a ruling for resolving the dispute based on the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and established international law surrounding maritime matters.



Delegates can also get Turkey and Greece to engage in sustained diplomatic dialogue mediated by impartial third party states or international organizations. This facilitated dialogue could focus on delineating maritime boundaries, exploring resource-sharing agreements, and addressing security concerns to foster mutual understanding and trust while resolving the dispute. However, delegates should avoid linking this issue to broader security relations, such as Turkey's EU or NATO membership, as these can complicate negotiations and progress towards a resolution.

As a initial measure, the committee could also try imposing a temporary moratorium on provocative actions in the contested maritime areas, such as halting military exercises, refraining from unilateral drilling or exploration activities, and respecting each other's territorial waters to reduce tensions and create a conducive environment for negotiations.

## Bibliography

### Useful Links

- [The Turkey-Greece Mediterranean dispute explained](#): Nearly 7 minute long video from TRT World visually explaining the history behind the current conflict in a quick, digestive and concise manner.
- [Turkey, Europe, and the Eastern Mediterranean: Charting a way out of the current deadlock](#): A report from the Brookings Institution analyzing the current state of the disputes and potential methods to resolve inaction.
- [Maritime disputes in the eastern Mediterranean: Why and why now?](#): Essay in the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute focusing specifically on perceptions from stakeholders on the topic as well as the issue as a whole.

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