

GREEK CONCERNS ABOUT POWER GAMBIT IN THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN

Stylios Kafestidis, PhD Student at the Department of International Relations, University of National and World Economy, Sofia

Abstract

In geopolitical perspective, the Eastern Mediterranean with its potential gas reserves has turned into a zone of tensions and growing contest between regional as well as external actors. Furthermore, the maritime delimitation disputes have increased the likelihood of confrontation between Turkey and Greece. The aim of this paper is to discuss the major concerns of Greece with regard to power politics in the Eastern Mediterranean. Analyzing political and diplomatic relations and applying instruments of geopolitical analysis, the paper discusses current achievements of the Greek foreign policy, the worrisome relations between Greece and Turkey, the Cyprus issue and the energy projects competition.

Greece perceives Turkey under President Recep Tayyip Erdogan as an increasingly authoritarian, unpredictable and revisionist state. Therefore, Greek policies aim to counter Turkey's expansionism by establishing a network of enhanced bilateral engagement with the US, France and countries from the Eastern Mediterranean. The paper, however, concludes that problems between Greece and Turkey still remain as one of the key challenges for Greece and its strategy in the region. It is particularly difficult for Athens and Ankara to solve their differences due to diverging mindsets and contradictory agendas. Trust can hardly be restored and time is required. There are hopes and expectations that common sense on both sides would prevail and a mode of cooperation with Ankara would be possible, even if the most difficult issues of the power gambit in the Eastern Mediterranean remain unsolved.

Keywords: *Greece, Turkey, Eastern Mediterranean, Cyprus issue*

Introduction

Greece is amidst the turbulence and is immediately affected by hasty developments in the Eastern Mediterranean region. Athens views the region as a source of instability, bordering volatile states like Libya and Syria, and hosting the transit route for refugees to Europe. This complex volatility has been heightened by the recent increase of great powers' competition in the region, in which Western powers attempt to curb the increasing Chinese and Russian influence. The situation is even further complicated by the

perceptions of Greek officials who are worried about growing authoritarian and revisionist trends in Ankara that makes Turkey under President Recep Tayyip Erdogan unpredictable and diverging from the West (Filis, 2020).

In recent years, the Eastern Mediterranean has become an area of interest for gas development and a potential hydrocarbon supplier for the European market. The region however is overwhelmed with complex geopolitical problems that have hindered gas field development at times of increasing turmoil and severe competition on the global energy market (Ellinas, 2022). The EU and individual member states have started securing new diversified hydrocarbon imports after deteriorating relations with Russia and imposing sanctions after Russian invasion in Ukraine. It appears vitally important for European countries to reduce their dependence on Russian natural gas imports, and alternative supplies may come from the Eastern Mediterranean. Explorations and new discoveries in the Exclusive Economic Zones of Cyprus, Egypt and Israel, are promising that even larger natural gas reserves may soon come into exploitation. The front-runner EastMed pipeline project aims to bring Cypriot, Egyptian and Israeli natural gas to Europe via Greece. Other projects envisage building a much shorter pipeline to Turkey for natural gas to be exported to the Turkish market or transported to the European market. (Grigoriadis and Levoyannis, 2021)

The Eastern Mediterranean is a zone of friction since the maritime delimitation disputes are likely to precipitate confrontation between Turkey and Greece. The aim of this article is to discuss the major concerns of Greece with regard to power politics in the Eastern Mediterranean. These involve the worrisome relations with Turkey, the Cyprus issue and the energy projects competition.

Greece aims to counter Turkey's expansionism and the so-called "gunboat diplomacy", which refers to Turkey's propensity to use navy in pursuit of the "Blue Homeland" doctrine following its ambitions to control the Mediterranean. In the Greek perspective, Turkey's claims over considerable parts of the Aegean and Mediterranean Seas undermine good neighbourly relations and stability in the region. (Dimou, 2022) Determined to curb the Turkish expansionist agenda, Greece has started pursuing tailored policies of greater engagement with the US, France, and the countries from the region.

Greece proactive foreign policy

Against the background of significant geopolitical change in the Eastern Mediterranean, Greece has engaged in increasingly proactive foreign policy. First and foremost was the improvement of relations with the United States. US-Greek Strategic Dialogue was launched in December 2018. Shortly afterwards, the US Congress passed the Eastern Mediterranean Security and

Energy Partnership Act of 2019, which led to the launch of the Eastern Mediterranean Energy Center, enhanced military aid to Greece and terminated the US arms embargo against Cyprus (Tziampiris, 2021)

Upgrading the strategic dialogue with the US, Athens included all dimensions of the Greece–US partnership - energy, investment, defense and people-to-people contacts. The Mutual Defense Cooperation Agreement was extended with a clause that avowed the will of both countries to mutually protect and defend “*the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the other against actions threatening peace*”. (Dimou, 2022)

Athens perceives this updated defense agreement as a protection against Turkish assertiveness and its war-threatening messages to Greece. The agreement also allows the US military to train in several locations throughout Greece, thus keeping the US engaged presence in the region. For its strategic location the port of Alexandroupolis has been transformed into an advanced facility, where US forces could be stationed, and also provides connection toward Bulgaria where there is also a joint military training facility for US forces (Novo Selo military training ground). Bulgaria has become important for Washington’s and NATO’s strategic planning as an alternative route to the Bosphorus, given the importance of the Black Sea. (Ibid.)

Similarly, Greece has put efforts in strengthening relations with France by signing a bilateral defense agreement and purchasing three French frigates by 2025. By doing so Greece upgrades its geopolitical standing and also consolidates its deterrence capabilities. The defense agreement with France includes a mutual defense assistance clause, which provides protection for Greece in case of military actions in the Eastern Mediterranean. This clause for mutual defense refers to the Article 42 (7) of the Treaty of European Union (Schmidt and Domingues dos Santos, 2022). Another defense agreement, which was signed between Greece and the United Arab Emirates in early 2021, also contains a similar mutual defense clause.

Greek forces take part in multinational air and naval exercises for defense-oriented purposes. These joint military exercises are conducted frequently across the Mediterranean Sea with the participation of armed forces formations from Greece, the U.S., Canada, Cyprus, Israel, Slovenia, Spain and the United Arab Emirates. The exercises aimed at strengthening cooperation and coordination in a complicated operational environment, as well as enhancing the operational capabilities of the air and naval forces of the participating countries. (Kokkinidis, 2021)

In 2020 Athens signed agreements with Italy and Egypt on the maritime zones and has expressed its willingness to comply with the UN Convention of Law of the Sea and negotiate similar agreements with other neighboring countries, including Turkey and Libya. The delimitation agreement with Egypt, which was concluded after 15 years of negotiations,

recognized all rights of coastal states in their maritime zones. The agreement ignores Turkey's claim that the Greek islands do not have an exclusive economic zone and refers to Article 121 of the UNCLOS, which specifies that *“islands have a right to territorial sea, contiguous zones, Exclusive economic zone (EEZ), and continental shelf in line with provisions applied in mainland areas”*. (Dimou, 2022)

This delimitation agreement will bring benefits not only to Egypt and Greece, but to the region as a whole, by attracting international investment in oil and gas exploration within demarcated maritime areas. It would also prevent Turkey from drilling in Libyan maritime areas that extend to Egyptian waters. Another benefit would be facilitation of infrastructure projects and construction of electricity interconnectors that will link the power grids of regional countries to Europe (Ibid.)

For many years Greece and Turkey have been involved in negotiations in an effort to come to a sort of resolution of their acrimonious dispute about the demarcation of the continental shelf and the respective maritime zones in the Aegean Sea. Most of the Greece's islands (2,463 out of 3,100 islands) are in the Aegean Sea, whereas Turkey has only three islands in the Aegean. They have agreed that Aegean islands will have no EEZs, despite the 200 miles allowed under UNCLOS, so that Greek islands lying off Turkey's coast will not deny Turkey any EEZ throughout much of the Aegean. At the same time, Athens has announced that it might unilaterally extend its Aegean islands' territorial seas from the six miles allowed prior to 1982 under international law to the twelve miles permitted under UNCLOS. Greece rejects the position declared by Turkey that the islands in the Eastern Mediterranean, and in particular the Greek islands, should not be taken into account when determining maritime borders. Greece maintains that the Turkish argument that Greek islands cannot create maritime zones because the Aegean is a semi-enclosed sea is invalid, because Ankara had applied the equidistance method when delineating its EEZ with the former Soviet Union in the Black Sea, which is also a semi-enclosed sea. In contrast, Turkey unilaterally proclaimed in 1986 a two-hundred-mile EEZ in the Black Sea in accordance with the provisions of UNCLOS – the same Convention, which Turkey has actually never signed and denied its application to the Aegean Sea. (Bryza, 2020)

In case Greece and Turkey do not find any agreed solution soon, they can refer the issue of the continental shelf to the International Court of Justice. The Court comes out with binding rulings in disputes between states that have agreed to appeal to it. The ICJ has a record of settlement of differences between states over delimitation of their continental shelf. If the two states decide to submit the case to the ICJ, it would be difficult to foresee the outcome of such a process because international case law regarding the effect

of islands on the delimitation of the continental shelf and EEZ is rather diffused. (Schaller, 2022)

Alternatively, Greece and Turkey may seek a way out of their maritime disputes by arbitration before the Permanent Court of Arbitration. The PCA facilitates arbitration and dispute resolution between states on legal issues, including territorial and maritime boundaries. (Dimou, 2022)

Regional geopolitics are changing swiftly and Athens' strategy for survival is developing a multi-player network for safeguarding its national security and regional stability. Greece still relies heavily on the United States in terms of military power, though Washington seems less engaged than it used to be. While seemingly keeping a less-engaged profile, the U.S. fosters initiatives that steer regional cooperation in directions that match American strategic interests. Having such an outlook on the region, Greece implements a national strategy with four major pillars, including closer relations with Israel; deepening military and political relations with the US; nurturing cooperation and new initiatives with the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia; and realisation of its own energy projects by enhancing participation in regional energy organizations. Greece commences the upgrade of its regional policy by augmenting its relations with Israel. The two countries signed a record defense procurement deal with a USD 1.65 billion contract for an Israeli defense contractor to build and operate a Hellenic Air Force training center over 22 years (Reuters, 2021). On the event of one of the latest outbreaks of violence between Israeli forces and Hamas, Athens shunned its traditional pro-Palestinian rhetoric and formally recognized Israel's right to self-defense. Greek Foreign Minister Nikos Dendias was the first European leader who visited Jerusalem and Ramallah since hostilities had broken out, thus emphasising his country's role as an honest broker in the region. (JINSA, 2020)

Since 2010 Greece has a record of cooperation activities with Israel. Among these it is worth noting the high-level political dialogue and academic exchanges as well as many joint military exercises. Before the outburst of the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of Israeli tourists visiting Greece exceeded half a million annually. Meanwhile, the Greek government criticised and opposed antisemitism. Greece and Israel are also extensively involved in energy cooperation. Greece alone has launched two major trilateral initiatives: one with Egypt and Cyprus in 2014 and a second one with Israel and Cyprus in 2016. These trilateral initiatives made closer contacts between leaders possible and their regular meetings and discussions pushed the institutionalisation of cooperation. It is important to highlight that the US occasionally joins the Israel-Greece-Cyprus trilateral process. (Tziampiris, 2021)

Greece also pays considerable attention to the Gulf states, especially such as the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain, which are normalising relations with Israel. This has made the cooperation of Greece and Israel with those states possible. These developments have opened a window of opportunity for Athens, which is aware of the convergence of interests between Greece and the Gulf states, which also perceive Turkey and Iran as competitors and potential threats. Supporting this assertion with evidence, the United Arab Emirates sent F-16 fighter to participate in joint exercises with Greece at a time when Greek and Turkish forces faced a standoff in the Aegean Sea. Then, Greece launched the *Philia* Forum (“*philia*” meaning “friendship” in Greek), inviting Bahrain, Cyprus, Egypt, France, Greece, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. The forum prioritised security, sovereignty and international legal norms, including those of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. Greece also hosted in 2021 the *Iniochos* military exercise, in which Canada, Cyprus, France, Spain, the UAE and the US took part. Greece’s Western partners, especially the US and France, support all these efforts. (Tziampiris, 2021)

Countries in the Eastern Mediterranean face common challenges and explore new opportunities to collectively respond to them. Therefore, they seek ways to intensify their cooperation mechanisms, one of which is the East Mediterranean Gas Forum. Greece promotes concerted efforts and the cooperative rather than the competitive approach to energy sources exploitation in the Eastern Mediterranean. Therefore, Greece has supported the Egyptian initiative for the establishment of the multilateral East Mediterranean Gas Forum. The Forum started as a cooperation platform for dialogue between governments, but it also facilitated communication and project development between states and the energy industry in the region. Based in Cairo, members of the Forum are Cyprus, Egypt, France, Greece, Israel, Italy, Jordan and the Palestinian Authority, and the US as an observer. There are expectations that this Forum can have an impact on trends on the global natural gas market and strengthen regional security by somewhat curbing Turkey’s contested gas exploration activities in the Aegean Sea disputed waters. (Dimou, 2022)

Greece is also interested in the construction of the Eastern Mediterranean underground natural gas pipeline of about 1,900 km, which is supposed to transport natural gas from offshore fields of Israel and Cyprus to Crete and mainland Greece, linking it eventually with Italy via the *Poseidon* pipeline. Negotiations are underway to connect Egypt to the pipeline. This project provides an opportunity to circumvent Turkey and Russia, and Europe may thus benefit and diversify its energy sources. However, the planning and implementation of this project is being disputed, as well as the opportunities for private funding and political guarantees are far from certain. On the other

hand, Greece may rely on a more feasible energy infrastructure project. It can finish the EuroAsia Interconnector, a high-voltage power transmission project linking the Israeli, Cypriot and Greek electricity grids, with an estimated cost of about 2.5 billion Euros. There is already a signed agreement for construction and the completion is expected in 2023. These are just two of the many energy projects in the region with many more expected to emerge in the coming years. Definitely, only a few will be completed in the near future and their realisation will depend on the enhanced regional policy of Greece and maintaining good relations with its neighbours. What we witness is a momentum of converging strategic interests of several Mediterranean and Gulf states and these emerging partnerships will likely have substantial upcoming effects. (Tziampiris, 2021)

Greece prioritises and actively promotes the energy infrastructure in the region in cooperation with neighbouring countries and the EU regarding the newly discovered hydrocarbon reserves in the Eastern Mediterranean (Egypt, Israel, and Cyprus). *“The EastMed Gas Pipeline (Greece-Cyprus-Israel-Italy), which is planned to transport gas from the Levantine Basin fields to Europe via Crete and mainland Greece, as well as the electrical interconnections between Greece, Cyprus, Israel and Egypt, are expected to produce geopolitical and economic benefits for all stakeholders at regional and European level. In this regard, Greece actively participates in the various tripartite, quadrilateral and multilateral schemes that have been developed in the region.”* (MFA Greece, 2022)

As the LNG brings many advantages in terms of transition to green economy and price competitiveness, Greece is eager to expand the LNG terminal in Revithoussa and is ready to invest in the energy security for itself and the whole region by the construction of the floating LNG storage and regasification unit (FSRU) in Alexandroupolis. The LNG terminal in Revithoussa is one of the 24 LNG terminals in the European Union and the only one in South-Eastern Europe. It has been in operation since the early 2000s, and has been receiving LNG imports based on long-term contracts mostly from Algeria, as well as imports from the spot market. Recently it has been upgraded in order to contribute to the security of energy supply to Greece and to neighbouring countries as well. The expected implementation of the FSRU in Alexandroupolis will offer a new LNG entry point and additional capacity for providing natural gas for the Greek and regional markets. (Ibid., 2022)

Greek – Turkish Frictions

Despite the obvious achievements of Greece's foreign policy, the long-term success of its strategy in the Eastern Mediterranean strongly depends on the development of its relations with Turkey.

Since the early 1970s Turkey has been systematically challenging and contending the sovereignty and jurisdictions of Greece. This anti-Greece policy has been aimed at changing the territorial status quo set out in international treaties, especially the Treaty of Lausanne, and the maritime zones and airspace. The launch of this policy opened a period of tension in Greek-Turkish relations that exists even today. Turkey made its first claims on the Greek continental shelf in 1973, and disputed the extent of Greek national airspace in 1975. The beginning of this new Turkish policy happened at the time of the Turkish invasion of Cyprus in July 1974 and the subsequent Turkish occupation of the northern part of Cyprus. (MFA Greece, 2022)

Tensions started to increase when Turkey disputed the delimitation of the continental shelf (1973) and the crisis that followed brought the two countries into a vehement controversy. Greece initiated bringing the issue to both the UN Security Council and the International Court in The Hague. Turkey in return continues to constantly increase contentions and claims, including:

- refuting Greece's legal right to extend its territorial sea to 12 nautical miles, as envisaged by the Law of the Sea; it is a common practice for nearly all coastal states in the international community, including Turkey (in the Black Sea and Eastern Mediterranean);
- challenging Greek national airspace with frequent violations by Turkish fighter jets;
- contending and violation of Greek sovereignty over islands;
- disputing the delimitation of territorial sea;
- questioning responsibilities within the Athens' air traffic control, sanctioned by ICAO, and refusal of Turkey to comply with air traffic regulations;
- disputing Greece's jurisdiction within the search and rescue area of operation under Greek responsibility;
- insisting on demilitarization of the islands in the Eastern Aegean Sea. (Ibid.)

Turkey expresses these contentions by resorting to methods that are in contradiction to the fundamental principles of the UN Charter (threat of war, violations carried out with armed fighter jets over inhabited islands, violations of Greek territorial sea, etc.).

Greece has accepted the general mandatory jurisdiction of the International Court in The Hague, with the exceptions foreseen in the respective declaration. The country has signed and ratified the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (1982). In 2015 with a special declaration Greece

excluded the delimitation of maritime zones from the jurisdiction of the Tribunal of the Convention, pursuant to article 298 of the Convention. Greece is willing to resolve the issue of the delimitation of the continental shelf, pursuant to international law. (Ibid.)

On the whole, two lines of thinking prevail in the Greek political discourse. The first, which the Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis adheres to, suggests that dialogue with Turkey is a necessary component of Greek foreign policy. The second, where former Prime Minister Antonis Samaras belongs to, considers dialogue an anathema as long as Turkey provokes and threatens Greece and insists on the implementation of sanctions in order for Turkey to change its behaviour in the Eastern Mediterranean.

At present there are only exploratory talks between the two countries. These are not a formal type of dialogue but an informal discussion process that can possibly lead to formal dialogue. This is where the problem begins. The agenda of Greece differs from that of Turkey. While Greece is prepared to discuss delimitation of the continental shelf and the exclusive economic zone in the Aegean and the Eastern Mediterranean as well as the stretch of territorial waters, Turkey pushes for a wider agenda. This includes the militarization of some Aegean islands, the sovereignty of some Aegean islets, the breadth of airspace and issues of search and rescue. If there is a convergence of interests, the two countries can either agree politically on a type of solution or refer their dispute to the International Court of Justice. No Greek government will give in and accept the Turkish comprehensive list of demands. For its part, Turkey will hardly be prepared to discuss maritime zones only. The likelihood of an impasse is high according to publicly available resources. In the scenario that Turkey accepts formal dialogue to focus on maritime zones only, a compromise between the two countries will be required. This compromise, which will be possibly reached at the International Court of Justice, will cause waves of reaction in Greece – even before the relevant announcement is made.

Another interesting question is how the restart of Greek-Turkish exploratory talks will impact on regional developments. The EU has already started preparations for the so-called multilateral dialogue for the Eastern Mediterranean. While seven actors, namely Greece, Cyprus, Italy, Israel, Egypt, the Palestinian Authority and Jordan, have already established the East Med Gas Forum, the European approach is more holistic and considers the participation of Turkey a prerequisite for the promotion of successful solutions in the Basin. The possibility of a multilateral dialogue is theoretically promising but wars in Syria and Libya as well as the Cyprus issue render the process particularly difficult. Nevertheless, talks on cooperation under the EU umbrella will certainly contribute to a better understanding among countries in the Eastern Mediterranean. Such a positive agenda will play a role of reconciliation in spite of the severity of existing problems. From the moment

exploratory talks are resumed, Greece can hardly play the card of sanctions against Turkey at the EU level - with the exception of the Turkish violations of the exclusive economic zone of Cyprus. Brussels and the international community, including all members of the UN Security Council, expect from Athens and Ankara to solve their differences in a peaceful way and via dialogue. The current situation requires delicate and careful management by the Greek side. A failure in the launch of formal dialogue due to Turkey's insistence on its demands could perhaps create the impression that Greece derailed the process. Greece needs not only to adamantly support its positions but improve its public diplomacy tools in order for its partners to be well aware of its cause. (Dimou, 2022)

Turkish Perspective: Claims and Demands

In Turkey's perspective its differences with Greece over the Aegean came as a result from the Lausanne Peace Treaty signed in 1923. The merit of the Lausanne Treaty was to sustain a political balance between Greece and Turkey by conforming their interests in the Aegean. In 1923, however, the continental shelf issue was not foreseen. Nevertheless, the inherent balance set forth by the Lausanne Treaty is a guideline in all respects, including the continental shelf. The main rationale of the Lausanne Treaty is to grant coastal states definite maritime areas and leave the remaining parts of the Aegean to the common benefit of Turkey and Greece. Certainly, if one of the littoral states decides on its own to expand its maritime areas in the Aegean, thus depriving the other coastal state from exercising its existing rights, the Lausanne balance would be breached.

Turkey formally adheres to the following principles with regard to bilateral Turco-Greek relations in the Aegean, outlined by its Ministry of Foreign Affairs:

- Perceptions of the Aegean as a common sea.
- Preserving the freedoms of the high seas and the air space above it to both coastal states as well as third countries.
- Extending maritime areas requires the consent of both Turkey and Greece and should be fair and equitable.
- The main source of tension between Turkey and Greece is the Greek perception of the entire Aegean as a Greek sea disregarding Turkey's rights and interests as one of the littoral states.

Turkey claims that its policy is based on respect for the status quo and it presumes Greece appears determined to alter the status quo in its favour.

The threat of extending Greek territorial waters beyond their present width of 6 miles (Greece extended its territorial waters from 3 miles to 6 miles in 1936, Turkey followed suit in 1964), the remilitarization of the Eastern

Aegean Islands placed under demilitarized status by virtue of the very agreements ceding them to Greece, a 10 mile “national air space” over territorial waters of 6 miles, abuse of the Greek air traffic control responsibility as if it confers sovereignty (request of flight plans from state aircraft and allegations of “violations of” Athens FIR) can be counted among these factors which are the real underlying causes of the Turkish-Greek conflict. (MFA of Turkiye, 2022)

The Cyprus Issue

The Cyprus issue has a long and complicated history merging internal and international dimensions. In July-August 1974 Turkish armed forces invaded the island of Cyprus and occupied some 37% of its territory. Since then the Cyprus issue has become an international problem of invasion and occupation in violation of the UN Charter and many UN resolutions. For 48 years already Turkey has refused to withdraw its occupation troops, despite the reactions of the international community which has repeatedly expressed its condemnation of the invasion in Cyprus and demanded the withdrawal of the Turkish occupation forces. Decisions and resolutions in this regard have been adopted in a variety of international fora, including the UN General Assembly and Security Council, the European Parliament, the Council of Europe, the Non-Aligned Movement, and the Commonwealth countries. (MFA Greece, 2022)

In November 1983 Turkey unilaterally declared independence of the occupied part of Cyprus under the name of Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. UN Security Council resolutions 541/1983 and 550/1984 condemned this illegal unilateral action, calling for its revocation and appealing to all states not to recognize the illegal entity. The UN resolutions demanded the Greek and Turkish communities on the island to negotiate a solution to the internal political problem of Cyprus with respect for the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of the Republic of Cyprus, swift withdrawal of foreign troops, cessation of all foreign interference in the internal affairs of the Republic of Cyprus, and facilitation for the return of all refugees to their abandoned homes. (Ibid.)

The UN resolutions also set the basis for a negotiated solution, which given the Republic of Cyprus' capacity as a member state of the European Union, will have to be fully compatible with the EU's institutional and legal framework and ensure the continued effective participation of Cyprus in the processes of decision-making in the European Union.

Ankara persistently follows policies for consolidation, international recognition and internal Turkification of the occupied area. Despite the undertaken obligations to the European Union included in the Additional

Protocol to the Ankara Agreement (EU Declaration of 21 September 2005), Turkey still refuses to recognize and normalize its relations with the Republic of Cyprus.

Greece's positions on the Cyprus issue stipulate the following:

- Termination of the Turkish occupation and settlement and finding “*a comprehensive, mutually acceptable, just and viable solution to the Cyprus problem*”;

- Despite previous disappointments and persisting difficulties, talks between the two communities – with the contribution of the good offices of the UN Secretary-General – remain the only method accepted by all parties concerned to achieve an agreed settlement of the Cyprus problem;

- Greece supports the efforts for a fair, balanced and viable solution to the Cyprus problem. An agreed solution must restore international legality, which has been violated by the Turkish invasion and continued occupation of the territory of the Republic of Cyprus, a sovereign and independent state that is a member of the United Nations and the European Union.

- The applicable resolutions of the UN Security Council are the only basis for an agreed solution, which must also take into consideration Cyprus' capacity as a member state of the EU.

- Greece refrain from intervening in the negotiation of internal aspects of the Cyprus problem, which is an exclusive competence of the Cypriot government.

- The complete withdrawal of Turkish occupation forces and the demise of the outdated system of guarantees of 1960 are “*an integral part of an agreed, viable and comprehensive solution of the Cyprus problem*”.

- Greece's position is that the process of withdrawal of the occupation forces must be brief, with a set pace of the military withdrawal and an exact deadline for full withdrawal.

- Greece rejects as “*unrealistic and legally groundless*” Turkey's demand for securing of the EU's “four freedoms” in the occupied zone of Cyprus.

- In Greek perspective, the self-declared Turkish Cypriot entity in occupied Cyprus, recognized only by Turkey, is illegal and condemned by the UN Security Council Resolutions 541 (1983) and 550 (1984), which should be strictly applied.

- The sovereign rights of the Republic of Cyprus in its exclusive economic zone is in no way related to the process of resolving the Cyprus problem. (MFA Greece, 2022)

Having this extensive list of stipulations and bearing in mind the full complexity and historical burden of Greek-Turkish relations, one can anticipate timeless negotiations requiring utmost diplomatic and political ingenuity and apprehension.

Conclusion

Geopolitical competition in the Eastern Mediterranean is increasing, which challenges Greece's ambitions to gain more influence in the region. Despite current achievements of the Greek foreign policy, discords with Turkey remain one of the key challenges for Greece and its strategy in the region.

Relations between Greece and Turkey are still far from normalization. Both countries are prepared for nothing more than exploratory talks. The resumption of those talks in Istanbul on 25 January 2021 and the commitment of both sides to continue the process in Athens generates hopes. What matters, at first, is the reduction of tensions between two NATO member states that can be a source of regional instability. The resumption of exploratory talks, of course, can hardly guarantee success. It is particularly difficult for Athens and Ankara to solve their differences due to diverging mindsets and contradictory agendas. Trust can hardly be restored and time is required. Though Greece is engaged in rounds of exploratory talks with Turkey, it is also focused on the modernization of its armed forces. There are hopes and expectations that common sense on both sides would prevail and a mode of cooperation with Ankara would be possible, even if the most difficult issues of the power gambit in the Eastern Mediterranean remain unsolved.

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