

New Developments in the Mediterranean:

Tensions Maintain, but so Do Dialogue Venues

During his official visit to Germany, where he met the **German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier**, the **President of Bundestag Wolfgang Schauble**, as well as the **Head of the European Affairs Committee** of Germany's directly elected Parliament, **Gunther Krichbaum**, the **Greek Foreign Minister Nikos Dendias** reiterated his **call for an embargo on Germany's certain goods to Turkey**.

The recent statements come as a development of the **on-going tensions between Turkey and Greece**, both NATO members, who disagree over their respective continental shelves, which bears on their **plans for exploiting hydrocarbon resources in the Eastern Mediterranean**. In fact, the maritime delimitation is a matter of historical importance for both actors, as pointed out in our previous Policy Brief (<https://www.irsea.ro/Eastern-Mediterranean-Tensions-Build-up&a/>).

This Wednesday, **Cyprus also called on Turkey to stop the exploration of hydrocarbons** in the "*Nicosia Exclusive Economic Zone*", an area which Turkey also laid claims on. In fact, Ankara has reserved an area just Southwest of Cyprus to conduct exploration between November 3, 2020 and February 16, 2021. Two Turkish ships, the *Barbaros Hayreddin Pasa* and *Oruc Reis*, both survey vessels, have announced their presence in the region.

The Turkish government has been a **persistent objector of Greece's exclusive rights and disputes Greece's and Cyprus' (referred to as the Greek Cypriot administration by the Turkish side)** claims over the waters Turkey is conducting hydrocarbons exploration in. In late October, the Turkish Office Of Navigation, Hydrography and Oceanography's Izmir station sent two Navtex messages indicating that **the demilitarized status of the Aegean islands of Samothrace, Lemnos and Agios Efstratios has been violated by Greece**. According to Ankara, the **Treaty of London (1913)** restricted the militarization of the Eastern Aegean Islands, whose demilitarized status was reconfirmed in the **Treaty of Lausanne (1923)**. With the longest coastline in the Eastern Mediterranean, Turkey considers Greece's maritime claims as harming its own sovereignty.

At beginning of November, **US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo** reaffirmed the American opposition to Turkish drilling efforts and, in a letter sent to **Foreign Minister Dendias**, commended Greece as a "*pillar of stability in the region*", while affirming that "*unilateral actions only serve to increase tensions in the region*", further adding that such incidents "*could lead to a conflict between NATO allies*."

At NATO level, **Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg** manifested his concern and showcased that **NATO's**

common efforts have helped establish a permanent hotline between Athens and Ankara.

In fact, the **efforts conducted by Greece and Turkey along with their NATO allies showcase not only the critical dimension of the on-going security crisis but, similarly, the importance all parties attach to dialogue.**

Of course, Europe and its closest partners know and value peace as a high and mutual growth engine and would certainly reaffirm that the 21st century has no place for zero-sum games. Despite historical differences being hard to reconcile, it is ultimately an act of popular volition, an exercise of sovereignty and a matter of diplomacy that alliances like NATO stem from. And as long as such an alliance is maintained, there will be no place for another Powder Keg on Europe's map.

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* The opinions expressed in this article are the author's own and do not reflect the official policy, position or view of the Romanian Institute for Europe-Asia Studies - IRSEA or any of its partners.