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Oceans and the law of the sea: oceans and the law of the sea

Letter dated 19 November 2021 from the Permanent Representative of Turkey to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I am writing to you with regard to the references made by Kyriakos Mitsotakis, the Prime Minister of Greece, to my country, in his statement during the general debate of the seventy-sixth session of the General Assembly of the United Nations.

It is unfortunate that the Prime Minister of Greece has once again presented a distorted view of the current developments in the Eastern Mediterranean, as well as of the Cyprus problem, in order to level baseless allegations against Turkey. We categorically reject them in their entirety. This ill-disposed attitude by Greece can by no means contribute to an environment conducive to cooperation and good neighbourliness.

The rhetoric employed by Greece at the General Assembly and its actions on the ground point to sharp inconsistencies. While Greece portrays itself as the “champion” of international law, it ironically persists with its material breach of international treaties that are crucial for peace and stability in the Eastern Mediterranean, namely the demilitarization provisions of the 1923 Lausanne and 1947 Paris peace treaties, as highlighted in my letters of 30 September 2021 ([A/76/379-S/2021/841](#)) and 13 July 2021 ([A/75/961-S/2021/651](#)). Turkey reiterates its call upon Greece to abide by the provisions of those treaties and to reinstate the demilitarized status of the Eastern Aegean Islands.

Moreover, Greece regrettably continues to ignore one of the main principles underpinning the international legal framework concerning the delimitation of maritime jurisdiction areas, that is, the principle of equitable delimitation. Greece has been pursuing maximalist boundary claims in the region, while ignoring Turkey’s sovereign rights and legitimate interests. The most conspicuous example of this policy was seen in August 2020, when Greece hastily signed a so-called delimitation agreement with Egypt, on the eve of the resumption of bilateral talks with Turkey. I would like to underline that the said agreement infringes upon Turkey’s inherent rights in the Eastern Mediterranean, and hence clearly runs counter to the spirit of good neighbourly relations.



If Greece is sincere in its call for the peaceful settlement of disputes among the two parties, then it must first abandon such maximalist demands. It must also stop oversimplifying the outstanding issues between Turkey and Greece. Those issues constitute a comprehensive package, which also includes the delimitation of the continental shelf, the breadth of territorial waters and national airspace, the sovereignty of islands, islets and rocks that were not ceded to Greece through valid international instruments, the violation of the demilitarized status of the Eastern Aegean Islands by Greece and the issue of service areas (FIR, SAR and NAVTEX). In spite of this fact, Greece tries to portray the situation as if there exists only one problem between the two States, namely the delimitation of the continental shelf. Without a correct diagnosis of the disputes and a genuine will to resolve them, we would only risk undermining the dialogue mechanisms that have already been set up to resolve those outstanding issues. For its part, Turkey has participated in the 63 rounds of consultative talks and engaged in political consultations with Greece with a constructive approach, and will continue to do so.

It is also regrettable that, in the regional context, Greece and the Greek Cypriot side have embarked on a quest to set up so-called regional cooperation schemes/mechanisms, which are inherently based on animosity against Turkey and intended to be utilized as a tool to advance the maximalist demands and narrow interests of the Greek-Greek Cypriot duo. This duo also spares no effort to exploit the European Union and use it as a shield for their anti-Turkey agenda. Recent initiatives by Greece, such as signing defence cooperation agreements with third countries, pose a further risk to regional stability. Turkey will continue to resolutely defend its vital interests in the region.

Turkey also proposed, in September 2020, holding an inclusive EastMed conference, with a view to initiating, among the relevant actors, a dialogue towards cooperation and paving the way for peaceful settlement of disputes in the Eastern Mediterranean. This proposal is still on the table.

As regards the Cyprus problem, I would like to underscore our support for a just and sustainable solution, based on the current realities on the island and through a new framework that would be freely negotiated between two equally sovereign parties. Attempts to dictate the settlement parameters are counterproductive and doomed to fail. Throughout more than half a century of negotiations, the federal model has proved impossible and unattainable as a sustainable settlement in Cyprus. This is due to the intransigence of the Greek Cypriot side, which has always refused to share power and prosperity with the Turkish Cypriot people. The Turkish Cypriot side's demand for securing their inherent rights, namely sovereign equality and equal international status, cannot be ignored. For this reason, the proposal presented by the President of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus during the informal five-plus-United Nations meeting, which took place from 27 to 29 April 2021 in Geneva, provides a constructive and realistic option for a just and lasting settlement in Cyprus.

Taking this opportunity, I would like to stress once again Turkey's readiness and full support for ensuring a just, equitable and peaceful solution to all pending issues, including the equitable delimitation of maritime jurisdiction areas with all relevant coastal States that it recognizes, in accordance with international law, in order to further contribute to the stability and prosperity of the entire Mediterranean basin. Turkey believes that building peace and stability in the Eastern Mediterranean will only be possible through dialogue and cooperation.

I would be grateful if the present letter could be circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda items 8 and 78 (a), and published on the website of the Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea, as well as in the next edition of the Law of the Sea Bulletin.

(*Signed*) Feridun H. **Sinirlioğlu**
Permanent Representative
