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Culture of peace

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

Letter dated 6 September 2022 from the Permanent Representative of Greece to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have been instructed by my authorities to draw your attention to the latest series of inflammatory statements made by the Turkish President, R.T. Erdoğan, quoted as follows:

- “[Greece] Your occupation of the islands is not our concern. When the time comes, we will do what is necessary. As we say, all of a sudden, we can come overnight.”
- “Greece, look at history, go back in time; if you go too far, the price will be heavy. We have one thing to say to Greece: remember İzmir.”

These statements were made during two of the Turkish President’s recent speeches on the 100th anniversary of the Greek-Turkish War of 1919–1922, in Kütahya (29 August 2022) and Samsun (3 September 2022), before large audiences.

Further to those quoted above, President Erdoğan, referring to the Turkish offensive of August 1922, remarked that the Greek people are as vile today as they were then. Referring again to the 1922 offensive, he asked his audience: “Are we ready for the attack of 2023?”

These public statements by the Turkish President speak for themselves; they are unprovoked, unacceptable and an insult against Greece and the Greek people. Their openly threatening nature and tone are more than obvious, thus dispelling any doubts as to their intended purpose, as well as any allegations that they are only meant for domestic reasons in view of the next elections in the country. Besides, these statements escalate an extremely aggressive rhetoric by the Turkish President himself, followed by other high-ranking Turkish officials, and constitute the mainstream in Türkiye’s official attitude towards my country during the past couple of years; this is



the case at a moment when our bilateral relations, not on Greece's responsibility, are currently witnessing one of their worst periods in years.

This rhetoric is coupled with a sharp rise in incidents in violation of my country's sovereignty in the Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean. In fact, for the past few years, Türkiye has been building up its revisionist agenda through propaganda putting in question the entire territorial status quo as established by treaties and thus putting at risk regional security and stability.

In addition to the above, such statements polarize the situation even further and imbue the Turkish people with hatred, enmity and contempt towards their Greek neighbours, thus making the prospects of rapprochement even more elusive. Last but not least, the Turkish leadership has apparently chosen to present future aggression as already prepared and, more importantly, as a justified action on the part of Türkiye. Unless seen in its true dimensions and properly dealt with by the international community, this Turkish overall attitude risks destabilizing our wider region and causing consequences of which the gravity is hard to assess.

In this extremely volatile environment, we should not forget that President Erdoğan decided a few months ago to sever all channels of high-level communication with Greece. My country, for its part, always advocates the need for dialogue as the only way to resolve any dispute, especially with a neighbouring State, which, however, as is known to anyone, maintains a *casus belli* threat against my country.

This is just a brief account of the current state of play in Greek-Turkish relations; I am at your disposal for any further facts and evidence on the matter.

The truth is that Greece is facing Türkiye's aggressive behaviour, expressed both in theory and in practice, something that can hardly be found in any other case of bilateral relations. This behaviour should be condemned by the international community and the United Nations as the custodian of international legality and peace. By not doing so in time or by underestimating the seriousness of the matter, we risk witnessing again a situation similar to that currently unfolding in some other part of our continent. This is something none of us would really wish to see.

I would be grateful if you could have the present letter circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda items 16 and 78 (a), and of the Security Council.

(Signed) Maria Theofili
Ambassador
Permanent Representative