

**Security Council**

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Letter dated 4 September 2020 from the Permanent Representative of Greece to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

I have the honour to enclose herewith a letter dated 3 September 2020, addressed to the Secretary-General of the United Nations from the Prime Minister of Greece, Kyriakos Mitsotakis (see annex).

I would be grateful if the present letter and its annex could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Maria **Theofili**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative



Annex to the letter dated 4 September 2020 from the Permanent Representative of Greece to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

I wish to bring to the attention of the United Nations the following events which cause us great concern.

In the past few months, Turkey has been engaged in a series of unlawful and provocative acts in the Eastern Mediterranean, in particular since the signing on 27 November 2019, of the illegal Memorandum of Understanding on maritime borders with Libya's Government of National Accord. This Memorandum was never endorsed by the Libyan Parliament as required by article 8, paragraph 2 (f) of the Skhirat Agreement of 2015, and was concluded despite the fact that the two countries have no common maritime boundaries. Furthermore, it completely ignores the presence of the Greek islands in the region.

However, since 21 July 2020, we have witnessed a major escalation of Turkish aggressive acts and rhetoric that constitute an open and unprecedented threat to Greece's sovereignty and sovereign rights, as well as to the peace and stability of the broader region.

It should be stressed that, at the core of the above acts, lies Turkey's intention to deprive Greece of its reasonable and legitimate sovereign rights in the Eastern Mediterranean by refusing to recognize the Greek islands' maritime zones beyond six nautical miles of territorial sea, in flagrant violation of the provisions of the international law of the sea and international jurisprudence.

More specifically, on 21 July 2020, Turkey issued a navigational warning (NAVTEX) announcing the conduct of seismic survey activities by the *Oruc Reis* research vessel in the Mediterranean, including within an area falling under Greek jurisdiction, for the period between 21 July and 2 August 2020. It is important to note that in that specific area, according to a recent statement by the Turkish Foreign Minister, Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, "there are overlapping claims with Greece". Since, however, Turkey believes that there are competing claims, it should also be aware that it has a clear obligation deriving from well-established rules of the law of the sea, to negotiate in good faith for the settlement of these claims, pending which it should refrain from pursuing hydrocarbon research activities in that maritime area, as well as from any other unilateral act not in conformity with the fundamental rules of international law.

Instead, Turkey decided to deploy a large military fleet to accompany the above seismic research vessel *Oruc Reis*, and, in addition, to increase its military presence in the Aegean and in areas of the Eastern Mediterranean close to the islands of Rhodes and Kastellorizo.

Despite all of the above, Greece has shown its readiness to resolve its dispute with Turkey regarding the delimitation of the maritime areas in the Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean, through dialogue and according to international law, but not under conditions of military pressure and threats.

Furthermore, Greece has been very supportive of the German mediation efforts regarding the resumption of the exploratory talks between Greece and Turkey. In this respect, the two Ministries for Foreign Affairs had agreed to announce their resumption.

On the pretext, however, that Greece and Egypt have concluded a maritime delimitation agreement, Turkey did not agree to the above announcement and the resumption of the exploratory talks, despite its declared "commitment to dialogue".

Needless to say that this agreement, which is the outcome of long and good faith negotiations between Greece and Egypt, based on the relevant provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, is of paramount importance for stability in the Eastern Mediterranean, which Turkey and the Libyan Government of National Accord attempted to undermine through an illegal and irrational “delimitation” between the two countries.

Reacting to the above, Turkey issued a new NAVTEX for exploration activities, and sent the *Oruc Reis*, escorted this time by 17 warships and two auxiliary vessels, to the area. Two Greek frigates were monitoring their activity. Simultaneously, the Turkish fleet was deployed in the Aegean and Greek Armed Forces were put on high alert.

Turkey is well aware that the deployment of a high number of military vessels risks provoking a military incident such as the one that took place on 12 August 2020. Indeed, during that incident, two frigates, the Greek *Limnos* and the Turkish *Kemal Reis*, collided in the area in which the *Oruc Reis* was present, owing to the Turkish vessel’s violation of the relevant maritime regulations. The *Kemal Reis* sustained serious damage, but the two sides agreed not to escalate, recognizing that the incident was not intentional. The Greek side kept the incident confidential, avoiding publicity. However, the next day, the incident was reported, in a distorted manner, not only by the Turkish media, but also by President Erdogan himself.

In addition, Turkey recently issued two more unauthorized NAVTEX warnings, announcing the conduct of illegal activities by the research vessel *Oruc Reis*, until 13 September, in the same sea area of the previous NAVTEX, and as close as 32 miles south of the Greek island of Kastellorizo. At the same time, the Turkish fleet continues to be deployed throughout the Aegean Sea and around this island. I wish to stress that Kastellorizo is an inhabited island close to Rhodes that forms part of the Dodecanese islands, and which Turkey tries to present as an isolated island, far from the Greek mainland, which in its view is a priori not entitled to any maritime zones other than territorial waters. This position however is contrary to the law of the sea and is not sustained by international jurisprudence.

I would be remiss not to mention in this respect the aggressive and unprecedented rhetoric against Greece by Turkish high officials, including President Erdogan himself and the Foreign Minister, Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, who openly threaten to wage war against Greece in case the latter extends its territorial waters in the Aegean to 12 nautical miles (“In the Aegean, Greece cannot extend its borders to 12 miles.... This is a cause of war (*casus belli*) ... We are not going to allow Greece to extend its territorial waters from 6 to 12 miles”, “I am being pretty clear.”)

All the above clearly demonstrate Turkey’s overt intention to continue its provocative behaviour towards Greece so as to create *faits accomplis* on the ground in the maritime area of the eastern Mediterranean, at the expense of Greece’s reasonable and legitimate rights, and notwithstanding the fact that such a behaviour dangerously increases tensions and instability in that area.

Moreover, Turkey threatens openly to use force against Greece by the massive display of its military fleet in the Eastern Mediterranean and as indicated by the explicit declarations to that effect of its officials, should Greece not concede to Turkey’s unreasonable and legally unfounded claims. This aggressive behaviour is against the Charter of the United Nations itself, which explicitly forbids States to use force or threaten to use force in their international relations.

The international community cannot and should not tolerate such an unlawful attitude by Turkey which seriously endangers regional peace and security, and should call upon this country to immediately cease all of the above illegal activities and abide

by the provisions of the Charter and international law, including the rules of the law of the sea.

Allow me to conclude by stressing that Greece remains committed to the principles of the peaceful settlement of disputes as enunciated in the Charter of the United Nations, and is ready to resume its dialogue with Turkey from the point at which they were interrupted in March 2016, on the basis of international law, including the law of the sea. This requires, however, that Turkey on its part is willing to cease any illegal activity in the Eastern Mediterranean and refrain from inflammatory statements and provocative actions that stand in the way of a meaningful dialogue.

I would be grateful if you could have the present letter circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Kyriakos **Mitsotakis**
