

Kalina Badowska, PhD

University of Trento

e-mail: kalina.badowska@gmail.com

ORCID: 0000-0002-3553-4710

Eliot Lopes, MSc

University of Trento

e-mail: eliot.lopes.lu@gmail.com

ORCID: 0009-0008-4018-5931

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A DIPLOMATIC CHESS GAME IN THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN: TURKEY, GREECE, AND THE FRENCH FACTOR

Abstract

This article critically examines the historical, legal, and geopolitical dimensions of the maritime boundaries conflict between Turkey and Greece, aiming to provide a comprehensive understanding of the intricacies surrounding the dispute and offering insights into potential pathways for resolution. The Turkish-Greek relationship has never been easy, but in the past few years number of incidents increased. The dispute between both countries is not only a territorial conflict. There is a broader geopolitical context involving countries such as France. The disputed maritime boundaries were subject to explorations of the large gas deposits under the seabed of the eastern Mediterranean. The EU also plays an important role in the conflict. Indeed, the EU supports Greece in the disputes between Turkey and Greece, as seen through the EU's criticism and resolutions towards Turkey.

Key words

Turkey, Greece, France, Mediterranean, Mavi Vatan

Introduction

Relations between Turkey and Greece have never been easy, but for the past few years the world has witnessed an increased number of incidents involving the air force or navy of both countries. Back at the beginning of this century, there was on average with around 20-30 'incidents' per year. One of the turning points in Greek-Turkish relations was the failed putsch in Turkey in 2016. Following this event, there was a tightening of the foreign policy course by President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. All events affect the easternmost Greek islands. Nonetheless, in August 2020, the conflict entered a new phase. Turkey concluded an agreement with Libya on a common maritime border and a special economic zone, which would include inter alia the Greek island Crete. Ankara's aim was to expand the area of its territorial waters in order to locate offshore hydrocarbon deposits around the Greek island of Kastellórizo¹. Greece opted for this with the establishment of a Greek-Egyptian economic zone².

Significantly, the Turkish-Libyan agreement could also threaten Cyprus' interests, as under the agreement Turkey can claim deposits under the seabed around the island. At the end of August

2020, the Turkish research vessel 'Oruç Reis' escorted by the Turkish navy was exploring the seabed in the disputed waters around the island of Kastellórizo³. The Greek side responded with military manoeuvres that also involved French armed forces (Paris took a strong side with Greece). In 2021, Greek-Turkish negotiations took place, which calmed the tense situation but did not resolve the problem, which is likely to rage on⁴.

Navigating Delicate Ties: Points of tension in the Turkish-Greek Relationship

The relationship between Turkey and Greece cannot simply be reduced to a territorial conflict. The rivalry between the two countries is linked to a much broader geopolitical context involving countries from France to the United Arab Emirates. The initiation of a new crisis between the two countries in 2020 must be sought in the complicated history between the countries⁵.

In historical terms, the memory of almost 200 years of conflict and ethnic cleansing in areas inhabited simultaneously by Greeks and Turks is an important issue. Significant points in the history of both states include the 1919-1922

1 L. Baker, T. Gumrukcu, M. Kambas, *Turkey-Libya maritime deal rattles East Mediterranean*, Reuters, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-turkey-libya-eastmed-tensions-explain-idUSKBN1YT0JK/> (access: 25.12.2019 r.).

2 M. Mourad, *Egypt and Greece sign agreement on exclusive economic zone*, Reuters, <https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-egypt-greece-idUKKCN25222H/> (access: 6.08.2020 r.).

3 *Turkish ship at centre of Greece row to return to Mediterranean*, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-54504123> (access: 12.10.2020 r.).

4 *Turkey-Greece: From Maritime Brinkmanship to Dialogue*, International Crisis Group, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/western-europemediterranean-turkiye-cyprus/turkey-greece-maritime-brinkmanship> (access: 31.05.2021 r.).

5 R. Czulda, *Grecko-turecki spór na Morzu Śródziemnym*, <https://milmag.pl/grecko-turecki-spor-na-morzu-srodziemnym/> (access: 20.05.2021 r.).

conflict, which became Turkey's founding myth, or Turkey's invasion of Cyprus in 1974⁶.

The dispute over Cyprus has negatively affected Greek-Turkish relations for almost three-quarters of a century. Independence was granted to the island in 1960 under a power-sharing agreement between the Greek and Turkish communities. A Greek was elected president and a Turk was elected vice-president. The government consisted of 10 ministers – seven Greeks and three Turks. The vice-president and ministers had the right to veto the president's decisions. Attempts to change the system to limit the influence of Turks in the political affairs of the country led to a civil war in 1963, which was quelled by United Nations (UN) intervention. Unfortunately, tensions between the two communities did not cease and led to Turkey's occupation of the north-eastern part of the island. As a result of the invasion, a quarter of the Cypriot population was removed from the occupied northern part, where Greek Cypriots made up more than 80% of the population. Less than a few months after the invasion, the Federal Turkish State of the Republic of Cyprus was proclaimed, which in future became the 'independent' Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), recognised only by the authorities in Ankara. These events led to the division of the island along the 180km UN-monitored Green Line⁷.

However, one of the current burning disputes concerns the delimitation of maritime boundaries. Unlike Greece, Turkey has not signed the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), which defines, inter alia, the boundaries of the continental shelf, territorial sea and maritime economic zones. Consequently, Turkey considers that most of the Greek islands in the Aegean Sea are on the Turkish continental shelf. Ankara believes that this fact deprives Athens of its rights to the territorial sea or economic zones around these islands. This state of affairs leads to frequent military incidents⁵.

Another element of the conflict is the issue of demilitarisation of the Greek islands of the northern Aegean Sea and the Dodecanese islands, which are subject to the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne and the 1947 Treaty of Paris. Turkey claims that Greece is in breach of these treaties. Ankara is contesting the legality of the presence of Greek armoured vehicles on the islands of Lesbos and Samos in September 2022⁸.

Nonetheless, one of the most difficult areas for agreement between the two states remains the issue of the outstanding conflict over the status of Cyprus since the 1960s. In 2021, Ankara decided to reject the idea supported by the UN and the European Union (EU) to formalise the TRCP and the Greek Republic of Cyprus (an EU member) into a single state. Turkey decided to

6 A. Michalski, *Odwilż w relacjach turecko-greckich*, <https://www.osw.waw.pl/pl/publikacje/analizy/2023-10-12/odwilz-w-relacjach-turecko-greckich> (access: 12.10.2023 r.).

7 A. Michalski, *Cypr w polityce Turcji*, <https://www.osw.waw.pl/pl/publikacje/komentarze-osw/2021-10-20/cypr-w-polityce-turcji> (access: 20.10.2021 r.).

8 A. Gautam, *The Greco-Turkish dispute over the Aegean Sea*, Indian Council of World Affairs, https://www.icwa.in/show_content.php?lang=1&level=1&ls_id=8622&lid=5627 (access: 14.11.2022 r.).

place emphasis on persuading the international community to recognise the TRNC's distinctiveness as an independent political entity⁵.

The undoubted migration issue (both countries lie on the route from the Middle East to Europe) is another problem in Turkish-Greek relations. Athens accuses Ankara of deliberately sending illegal migrants from Turkish territory into Greek territorial waters. On the other hand, Turkey believes that resisting the reception of migrants violates the provisions of the migration agreement concluded between the EU and Turkey in 2016⁹.

Mediterranean Sea Discoveries and the Turkey-Greece Tension

Exploration work has led to the discovery of a number of gas deposits under the seabed of the eastern Mediterranean. The largest of these include: the Leviathan field to the east of Israel (estimated at 450 billion cubic metres of gas and up to 600 million barrels of oil) and the Aphrodite field to the south of Cyprus (estimated at up to 170 billion cubic metres of gas). The extraction of such volumes of gas and oil could prove to be an extraordinary economic opportunity for the region¹⁰.

One proposed solution is to exploit the Aphrodite field through the cooperation with Egypt. Egypt currently has two gas liquefaction stations to convert natural gas into liquefied natural gas (LNG). The project is to include a pipeline between Cyprus and Egypt. The gas will first be transported via Cyprus to Egypt for liquefaction and then the LNG will be exported to Europe via Egypt. NewMed Energy, together with partners Chevron and Shell, is currently expected to submit plans for the development of this project to the Cypriot government. However, Turkey believes that revenues from the sale of gas should be shared with the TRNC¹¹.

Another country that could be a major energy exporter in the Eastern Mediterranean is Israel. The Leviathan gas field is located in Israel's exclusive economic zone (EEZ). The EEZ is a body of water where the coastal state has sole rights to the resources in and under it¹². In 2020, gas from the field was exported to Egypt and Jordan for the first time since its discovery. But the much bigger project for Israel is the proposed EastMed pipeline, which would export Israeli and Cypriot gas to Greece and from there to Europe. Initial calculations estimate that the investment can be completed in 2025¹³.

9 Greece says Turkey is pushing migrants into its waters, <https://www.dw.com/en/greece-accuses-turkey-of-pushing-migrants-into-its-waters/a-59772770> (access: 11.10.2021 r.).

10 A. Rabinovitch and M. Kambas, *Cyprus, Israel seek gas-sharing formula to unlock East Mediterranean energy hub*, Reuters, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-israel-cyprus-aphrodite-idUSKBN1180UQ/> (access: 07.05.2018 r.).

11 A. Rabinovitch and R. Bousso, *Aphrodite gas field off Cyprus to be linked to Egypt, NewMed says*, Reuters, <https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/aphrodite-gas-field-off-cyprus-be-linked-egypt-newmed-2023-05-31/> (access: 31.05.2023 r.).

12 United Nations, United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, Part V, Article 56

13 A. Bloch and I. Saber, *What's Driving the Conflict in the Eastern Mediterranean?*, LAWFARE, <https://www.lawfaremedia.org/article/whats-driving-conflict-eastern-mediterranean> (access: 25.01.2021 r.).

Unfortunately, the problematic issue is the attitude of Turkey, which has not ratified UNCLOS and believes that its EEZs are far greater than those under the treaty. The government in Ankara claims that the Turkish EEZ runs closer to Crete and Cyprus. The matter is further complicated by the fact that the TRNC has also designated its own separate EEZ. Surprisingly, the TRNC-designated EEZ extends far to the south-east of Cyprus and includes the Aphrodite deposit. These problems have been known for years, but Turkey reminded us of them by signing an agreement with Libya to demarcate its EEZs. In light of this agreement, a border between the Libyan and Turkish EEZs runs to the south-east of Crete. These zones form a cordon that crosses the Mediterranean Sea and will thus separate Greece from Cyprus and is in the path of the EastMed gas pipeline¹⁴.

The agreement was declared illegal under UNCLOS and condemned by Greece, Egypt, Cyprus and the EU. The agreement between Greece and Egypt was a response to the Turkish-Libyan agreement, especially in light of recent Turkish seismic surveys around the Greek island of Kastellórizo, which, according to the Turkish-Libyan agreement, lies on Turkey's continental shelf¹⁵.

Geopolitical dimension

The events that started to intensify the conflict between Greece and Turkey were initiated by Turkish government, who decided to grant Turkish Petroleum concessions to explore oil and gas fields located around Rhodes and Crete. Furthermore, in 2020, the Turkish government decided to send the research vessel Oruc Reis to the area around the island of Kastellórizo to search for deposits. This act put the Greek navy on alert. Mediation through Germany calmed the situation. However, a few days after the agreement between Greece and Egypt has been signed, the research vessel Oric Reis was already sailing between Crete and Cyprus, with Greek and Turkish warships following it. These events even led to a collision between a Greek ship and a Turkish frigate¹⁶.

The deal between Turkey and Libya meant that France and Egypt were also caught up in the conflict. The reason was that Turkey shared economic zones with the Libyan government from Tripoli, which is one of the parties involved in the civil war in Libya. As for Egypt, it supports the rival Libyan government in Tobruk led by General Khalifa Haftar. This is because, since 2014, the Egyptian presidency has been held by Marshal Abd al-Fattah as-Sisi, who overthrew the government of

14 H. Kozieł, *Turcja sięga po sporny kawalek gazowego tortu*, parkiet.com, <https://www.parkiet.com/gospodarka-swiatowa/art19754521-turcja-siega-po-sporny-kawalek-gazowego-tortu> (access: 16.09.2020 r.).

15 S. Nowacka, *Znaczenie umowy egipsko-greckiej o delimitacji obszarów morskich dla polityki regionalnej Egiptu*, PISM, https://www.pism.pl/publikacje/Znaczenie_umowy_egipskogreckiej_o_delimitacji__obszarow_morskich_dla_polityki_regionalnej_Egiptu (access: 28.09.2020).

16 T. Tsakiris, *Inflammable Waters: Turkey's Strategic Objectives in the Eastern Mediterranean and the East Med Gas Pipeline (EMGP)*, IEMed Mediterranean Yearbook 2020, <https://www.iemed.org/publication/inflammable-waters-turkeys-strategic-objectives-in-the-eastern-mediterranean-and-the-east-med-gas-pipeline-emgp/> (access: 12.08.2023 r.).

the Muslim Brothers. The latter maintain close ties with the UN-recognised Government of National Unity (GNA). The GNA, in turn, is an entity that is in conflict with Libyan General Khalif Haftar. It is noteworthy that Haftar receives support from France, the United Arab Emirates and from Egypt¹².

On the other hand, France opposed the fact that Turkey is providing the authorities in Tripoli with arms and mercenaries. Interestingly, it was France itself that was involved in setting up this government after the overthrow of Gaddafi in Libya¹⁷. France decided to send its fleet to the eastern Mediterranean in the summer 2020 and conducted joint manoeuvres with the Egyptian fleet there. France also conducted joint military manoeuvres with the Greek fleet and sent its Rafale jets to Crete⁵. Another aspect that causes tensions between Ankara and Paris is the issue of Syria. While Ankara sees the Democratic Union Party (PYD) and the People's Protection Units (YPG) as a threat to national security, France has established direct contacts with these groups mainly because it sees them as an asset and partner in the fight against ISIS¹⁸.

Importantly, the Americans also exercised jointly with the Greek navy in August¹⁹. Moreover four F-16 fighter jets

from the United Arab Emirates landed on Crete at the end of August. Despite the fact that this Middle Eastern monarchy does not claim Cyprus' deposits, it wanted to play on Turkey, with which it is in conflict over the Libyan issue²⁰.

The dispute between Turkey and Greece in the Mediterranean not only affects the changing dynamics of relations between the two countries, but is also a cause for concern for at least two organisations: the EU and the NATO. The problems between Turkey and Greece are affecting Turkey's relations with the US and the EU. Greece is cleverly exploiting Washington's growing distrust of Ankara by presenting itself as an alternative military cooperation partner and host for US military infrastructure. A US naval base on Crete has existed since 1969 and the 2022 defence cooperation agreement allows access for the US to infrastructure in Greece⁶.

The EU, also plays an important role in the conflict. Athens can count on the EU's support in its disputes with Ankara, as seen in the EU's criticisms and resolutions towards Turkey and in blocking attempts to restart Turkey's accession talks²¹.

Also worth mentioning is the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF), established in January 2020 and based in Cairo. This forum brings

17 *France's Macron accuses Turkey of playing 'a dangerous game' in Libya*, <https://www.france24.com/en/20200622-france-s-macron-accuses-turkey-of-playing-a-dangerous-game-in-libya> (access: 22.06.2020).

18 *French-Kurdish talks in northeast Syria likely to anger Turkey*, <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1670181/middle-east> (access: 26.11.2023 r.).

19 L. Jakes, *U.S. Will Base Mammoth Ship in Greece, Near Disputed Territory*, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/29/us/politics/greece-turkey-us-navy.html> (access: 29.09.2020 r.).

20 A. Ahronheim, *UAE sends F-16 jets to Crete for joint drills with Greece*, <https://www.jpost.com/middle-east/uae-sends-f-16-jets-to-crete-for-joint-drills-with-greece-639739> (access: 24.08.2020 r.).

21 M. Leigh, *An appropriate European Union response to tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean*, <https://www.bruegel.org/blog-post/appropriate-european-union-response-tensions-eastern-mediterranean> (access: 28.08.2020 r.).

together countries such as Cyprus, Egypt, Greece, Israel, Jordan, the Palestinian Authority, and Italy (which joined in September by signing the EMGF charter). France is applying for membership, and the United States as well as the EU have applied for observer status. Turkey's non-participation clearly reflects the members' stance towards that country's policies in the region. Ankara regards the EMGF as an illegitimate body that disregards the interests of Turkey and Northern Cyprus²².

Beyond Borders: Turkey's 'Blue Homeland' and France's 'Pax Mediterranean' – Competing Visions in the East Mediterranean

As Turkey began drilling operations in the north-eastern part of Cyprus in Cypriot territorial waters, French President Emmanuel Macron strongly sided with Greece. Macron found Turkey's conduct in the eastern Mediterranean unacceptable and called on European countries to form a strong front against Turkey's aggressive policy.

Turkey's confrontational policy in the eastern Mediterranean stems from the content of the Mavi Vatan doctrine (also known as the "Blue Homeland" doctrine), which was formulated by Admiral Cem Gürdeniz in 2006. However, it was not until the former Chief of Staff of the Turkish Navy,

Admiral Cihata Yayci, that the doctrine was refined to the level of state doctrine. Mavi Vatan in practice means extending Turkey's maritime borders to 462,000 square metres. The designed borders are to be defended by means of diplomatic and military coercion. The idea also aims to reposition the country to the level of a maritime power²³.

In this respect, the 'Blue Homeland' doctrine is primarily aimed at rejecting Greek and Cypriot claims in the eastern Mediterranean and thus the 'Seville map' (i.e. the map published by the University of Seville confirming the territorial claims of Cyprus), which has been accepted by the EU. The drafters of this doctrine claim that the Montego Bay Convention has no legal significance for Turkey because Turkey has never signed it. They reject the principles of this Convention, considering them ill-suited to the geography of the Mediterranean, particularly because the EEZ boundary of 200 nautical miles is unrealistic in a confined space with numerous islands. As a result, a country like Greece would have a huge maritime area, including sovereignty over islands close to the Turkish coast, such as Kastellórizo. Admirals, while recognising the specificity of the Greek-Turkish border situation, question the application of the principles of the Montego Bay Convention in this case and support the introduction of a special regime in the region²⁴.

22 M. Sukkarieh, *The East Mediterranean Gas Forum: Regional Cooperation Amid Conflicting Interests*, Natural Resources Governance Institute, 2021.

23 J. Jabbour, *France vs. Turkey in the EastMed A Geopolitical Rivalry between a „Keeper” of the Old Order and a Challenging Emergent Power*, IFRI, 2021.

24 A. Deriziotis, *The "Blue Homeland" and Erdoğan's Rhetoric: State Doctrine or Populist Narrative?*, *Convergence and Confrontation: The Balkans and the Middle East in the 21st Century* (2021) Article 1 (p. 9–32).

However, this vision of national sovereignty proposed by Ankara and its attempt to achieve hegemony in the Mediterranean is contrary to France's interests in the region. Emmanuel Macron would undoubtedly like to restore France's position as hegemon in the Mediterranean, which Paris considers to be its traditional sphere of influence. In the spirit of the projects initiated by his predecessors (Chirac's Barcelona Process and Sarkozy's Mediterranean Union), President Macron wants to establish a Pax Mediterranean with a regional character. One of the pillars of France's foreign policy is to build a Mediterranean order around political cooperation that revolves around Paris²⁵.

Consequently, it was in France's interest to publicly support Greece and Cyprus in their dispute with Turkey over the maritime delimitation. France decided to cool down Turkey's expansionist inclinations. Firstly, France offered to sell Rafale fighters to Greece. Finally, France sent the nuclear aircraft carrier Charles de Gaulle to the eastern Mediterranean and took part in joint military manoeuvres with Nicosia and Athens. In short, the conflict between Turkey and France is the result of a worldwide shift in the balance of power and the rise of middle states that are going against the *status quo ante*, challenging the European-centric order²⁶.

Fostering Future: Prospects for Turkey-Greece Relations

Greece is considering whether it should give the impression that it has a desire to negotiate on issues such as the right to extend its territorial waters in the Aegean Sea or sovereignty over uninhabited islands like Imia/Kardak, which it believes have been decided in its favour anyway. This approach makes Greece officially focus only on the issue of the delimitation of the continental shelf. However, since 2002, Greece and Turkey have held a series of sixty secret exploratory meetings, which were intended to cover a wide range of issues beyond the continental shelf matter²⁷.

Little information from these aborted negotiations has made its way to the press. However, it was said that an agreement to resolve all outstanding issues, including by going to the International Court of Justice, might be achievable²⁸. Nonetheless, considerable work has been done by both sides that can serve as a basis for future negotiations. In the meantime, Greece and Turkey are currently working on a new engagement initiative called the Positive Agenda, a joint effort covering issues ranging from health and tourism to entrepreneurship and the environment. This initiative has the potential to build trust and prepare

25 T. C. Tasche, *The Project of a Union for the Mediterranean – Pursuing French Objectives through the Instrumentalisation of the Mare Nostrum*, Dans L'Europe en Formation 2010/2 (n° 356), p. 53-70.

26 G. Georgiopoulos, *France stands by Greece over tensions in Aegean Sea: French defense minister*, <https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-greece-france-defence-idUKKCN20H0FA/> (access: 23.02.2020 r.).

27 *Turkey, Greece to hold new round of exploratory talks in Athens*, BY DAILY SABAH WITH REUTERS, <https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/diplomacy/turkey-greece-to-hold-new-round-of-exploratory-talks-in-athens> (access: 20.02.2022 r.).

28 *Turkish FM: Taking sea dispute with Greece to International Court an open option*, ekathimerini.com, <https://www.ekathimerini.com/news/247832/turkish-fm-taking-sea-dispute-with-greece-to-international-court-an-open-option/> (access: 22.12.2019 r.).

the parties for negotiations on more contentious issues²⁹.

In addition, recent heightened bilateral tensions were muted following the devastating earthquakes that hit Turkey in February 2023 and the tragic train crash in Greece the following month. Both countries supported each other with what showed responsibility in the face of these tragedies. Greece was one of the first countries to send search and rescue teams to Turkey to help decongest and search for survivors. In response, Turkey was quick to express solidarity with Greece after the train disaster, expressing public sympathy. Although little has happened after a similar surge of mutual empathy that initiated 'earthquake diplomacy' in 1999, the current political backdrop provides an inspiring impetus³⁰.

Besides, both countries assure that they will cooperate on solving the immigration crisis. Both sides undoubtedly need an extension of the EU agreement on illegal migration which expired in 2021³¹.

Another important aspect is that the European Union needs new gas suppliers, so improving relations between Athens and Ankara may provide an opportunity to expand at least the already existing gas transmission infrastructure to obtain gas from Azerbaijan or Iran, for example, and even from Israel and Egypt in the future.

Nevertheless, the rapprochement process between Ankara and Athens should not be expected to lead to a resolution of long-standing conflicts over maritime borders or the Cyprus issue, which have been entrenched for decades.

Summary

The problematic raised in the preceding paragraphs raises the question whether Turkey should sign and ratify the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea or there should be a bilateral treaty between Greece and Turkey.

The former evidently seeming the most straightforward solution couldn't be achieved. The reason is that UNCLOS states that islands are the same as a continental landmasses, and are also entitled to an EEZ³². UNCLOS is in Ankara's view a matter of safeguarding Turkish national interests because Turkey's sovereignty would be restricted. Indeed, the high concentration of Greek islands along the Turkish coast and thus the Aegean would de facto become a Greek sea, in terms of exploiting its resources.

On one hand Turkey signing and ratifying UNCLOS would provide clear guidelines and protections for its maritime rights and resources. In addition, Turkey would have access to a dispute resolution mechanism that could help resolve the aforementioned conflicts.

29 *Türkiye, Greece agree to further improve ties through positive agenda*, <https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkiye-greece-agree-to-further-improve-ties-through-positive-agenda-181805> (access: 22.03.2023 r.).

30 A. Coşkun, *Rapprochement Between Greece and Türkiye: Seemingly Impossible, Yet Not Unimaginable*, Georgetown Journal of International Affairs, <https://gjia.georgetown.edu/2023/05/13/rapprochement-between-greece-and-turkiye-seemingly-impossible-yet-not-unimaginable/> (access: 13.05.2023 r.).

31 *Greece seeks EU-Turkey migration deal expansion*, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/migration/news/greece-seeks-eu-turkey-migration-deal-expansion/> (access: 25.09.2023 r.).

32 *United Nations, United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea*, Part VIII, Article 121

On the other hand, UNCLOS argue that the convention infringes on Turkey's sovereignty by requiring it to share resources and pay royalties for the exploration and exploitation of seabed minerals beyond its continental shelf.

Nevertheless, Turkey is effectively denying itself the benefits and protections offered by this international framework.

The latter is thus the more realistic solution as it could include economic clauses and thus creating some new relations between both countries³³. Ultimately the issue at hand are the resources.

As stated by Andreas Østhagen in article *Maritime boundary disputes: What are they and why do they matter?*, the maritime space includes sovereign rights to resources which it includes. Further, Østhagen claims that while "States cannot deny passage through their EEZs; they may only deny actors access to marine resources and apply environmental regulations in their maritime zones." Thus delimitations in the maritime space becomes a matter of "reasonable sacrifice" which suggests a division of the overlapping area or a joint sharing, including oil and gas resources or fisheries zones³⁴.

In addition, Prosper Weil argues that: "Maritime boundaries, like land boundaries, are the fruit of the will of

States or the decision of the international judge, and neither governments nor judges limit themselves simply to scientific fact"³⁵.

In contrast to the proposed solution, today's multipolar world hinders further negotiations or agreements because of the increasing instability on the geopolitical scene. The reason for this is two-fold. First because of the increasing numbers of conflicts in the world and second because the US is slowly losing its position of "world gendarme". Thus allowing countries, such as Turkey, to emerge from a former bi-polar world with a hostile foreign policy favouring its national interest. Indeed, Turkey's foreign policy under Erdogan is increasingly showing elements of Neo-Ottomanism.

For instance, Turkey's decision to turn the Byzantine basilica Hagia Sophia into a mosque³⁶. Similarly, the Mavi Vatan doctrine mentioned earlier is the element of Neo-Ottomanism.

Neo-Ottomanism is an irredentist and imperialist political ideology that honours the former Ottoman Empire and promotes greater political engagement of Turkey within regions formerly under the rule of the Ottoman Empire.³⁷ It promotes the creation of a sphere of influence based on political Islam, which stretches from Qatar, across northern Iraq and Syria, to Libya, and

33 Such as the 2010, Norwegian-Russian agreement on the maritime boundary in the Arctic.

34 A. Østhagen, *Maritime boundary disputes: What are they and why do they matter?*, "Marine Policy" 2020, Volume 120.

35 P. Weil, *The Law of Maritime Delimitation – Reflections*, London, 1989, p. 30-31.

36 M. Ayoub, *Return of the Empire: Why Erdogan Wants to Resurrect the Ottoman State, The national interest*, <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/return-empire-why-erdogan-wants-resurrect-ottoman-state-167404> (access: 22.08.2020 r.).

37 E. Wastnidge, *Imperial Grandeur and Selective Memory: Re-assessing Neo-Ottomanism in Turkish Foreign and Domestic Politics*, "Middle East Critique" 2019, 28 (1), p. 7-28.

supporting the Government of National Accord (GNA)³⁸.

Erdogan's Neo-Ottomanism is all about projecting Turkey's power beyond its borders by spreading a Muslim Brotherhood-inspired agenda in hotspots such as the Greek waters. Turkey has thus adopted Iran's strategy of using deniable proxy activities to coverup the real nature of its plans³⁹.

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About the Authors

Kalina Badowska, PhD, scientist, molecular biologist. The representative of the International Scientific Society for Security “Save the Word” in Italy. Representative of the University of Trento and finalist during the VI edition of the International Geopolitical Olympiad in 2023.

Eliot Lopes, MSc, legal advisor. LL.B. from the University of Luxembourg and MSc in European and International Studies from the University of Trento. The representative of the International Scientific Society for Security “Save the Word” in Italy.