DISCUSSION PAPER

# Against All Odds: Turkey's Position in the Eastern Mediterranean

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# Introduction

Is the Middle East on the verge of even greater turmoil because of natural resources? The Eastern Mediterranean is an important geostrategic location between the Middle East and Europe. This region only recently drew the attention of energy giants after the discovery of massive hydrocarbon deposits and brought conflicts to the surface over maritime border disputes. Explorations for resources have increased in the region since the early 2000s and peaked after 2009 when major natural gas fields were discovered offshore. The potential of the fields is promising and can transform the countries of the region from energy-dependent ones to energy exporters.

In light of the new competition over energy, the delimitation of the maritime boundaries in the East Mediterranean has become one of the top foreign policy priorities of the coastal countries. Besides the debates on the limits of the continental shelf, self-declared Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ) also became a part of the problem. The EEZs represent a barrier to the fair solution of the hydrocarbon resources distribution dilemma.

Circumstances in the Eastern Mediterranean are becoming more complicated with each passing day, as the exploration and exploitation of natural resources continues without any concrete solution to the delimitation question within the framework of international law. Turkey, as a country that has not declared an EEZ in the East Mediterranean, is attempting to solve the delimitation problem based on fairness and equity while also expecting mutual respect for its national interests.

This discussion paper analyses the Turkish position in the Eastern Mediterranean delimitation and counterclaims to the Turkish position by neighbouring states. After outlining the definitions of the continental shelf and the EEZ, the paper will examine Turkish positioning and demands with regards to potential solutions of the East Mediterranean issue. Accordingly, the paper will also examine the counterclaims, mainly by Greece and Greek-Cypriot Administration, on the division of the continental shelf and claims based on the Seville Map. Furthermore, the problem in Cyprus extended to the debate over self-proclaimed EEZ by the Greek-Cypriot administration, which claims the authority over the whole of the land and water of the island. Thus, the paper will also analyse the reasons behind Turkey's demands for fairness in the sharing of the hydrocarbon wealth on the island without alienation of the Turkish inhabitants of Cyprus. The paper will also cover previous international cases between states on the disputes of the maritime delimitation as a precedent from international law. Finally, the paper will discuss the recommendations to strengthen Turkey's position further.

# UNCLOS and Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ)

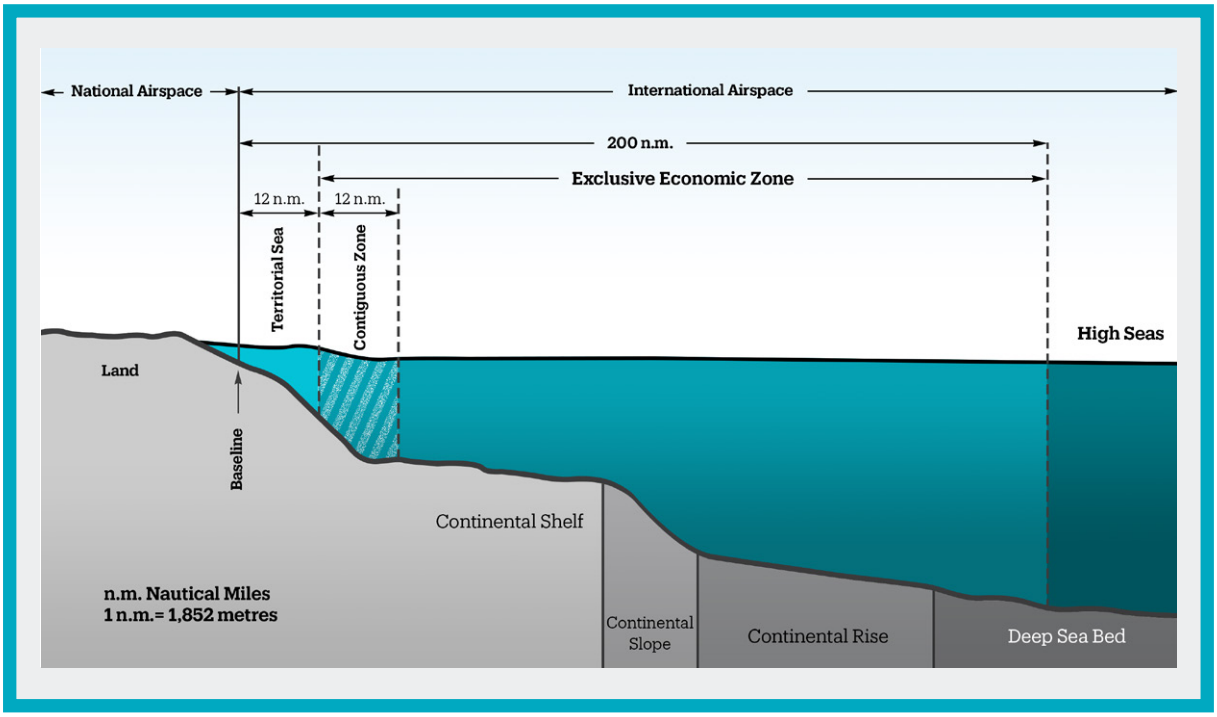



*Figure 1, Legal Boundaries of the Oceans and Airspace*

By definition, an Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) is an area that gives power to the coastal state to execute exploration rights and exploit the marine resources under its own authority in a defined section of the continental shelf up to a maximum of 200 miles off-shore (OECD Definition for the EEZ). The concept of an EEZ first appeared in the "1958 Geneva Convention on the Territorial Sea and the Contiguous Zone" where the exact scope of territorial waters were not proposed. Although the Geneva Convention empowered states with the authority to exploit natural resources in their seabed, the lack of a defined distance within which this authority was to be exercised created a problem of the limitlessness of the maritime boundaries.

Because of previous disagreements on maritime boundaries, the Third United Nations Conference on the Law of the Sea (1973-1982) witnessed a series of discussions on delimitation. The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), which was the product of the conference mentioned above, ruled 12-mile width for the territorial waters - the first

> "In exercising its rights and performing its duties under this Convention in the exclusive economic zone, the coastal State shall have due regard to the rights and duties of other States and shall act in a manner compatible with the provisions of this Convention." (Clause 2, Article 56, UNCLOS, 1982)

[1] https://stats.oecd.org/glossary/detail.asp?ID=884

time in history where the document also regulated the EEZ and set it as common law. Article 55 of UNCLOS attached EEZs to the territorial waters of a state and subjected to its private legal regime.

UNCLOS gives exclusive jurisdiction to coastal states – however, as Article 56 states; EEZ claimants are not sovereign over the waters and need to be respectful and fair to their maritime neighbours. Furthermore, Article 77 guarantees the coastal state the right to explore and exploit natural resources over its continental shelf with the only exception being the necessity to acquire the consent of any other coastal state bordering the sea territory. However, the limitations on the exceptional rights of the coastal state on its continental shelf are not limited to the UNCLOS articles. The UN General Assembly (UNGA) resolutions of 2749 (XXV) and 2750 (XXV) dated from 1970 confirm that the international seabed is the 'Common Heritage of Mankind' and need to be protected against unlimited exploitation and security threats.

According to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), the coastal countries in the Eastern Mediterranean: Egypt, Turkey, Israel and Palestinian Authority (Gaza Strip), Lebanon, Syria, the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) and the Greek Cypriot Administration of Southern Cyprus have rights on the resources in the area according to their Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ) (UNCLOS, 1982). However, Turkey did not become part of UNCLOS stating its concerns on the maximum 12-mile rule for territorial waters and compulsory jurisdiction in disputes. Any coastal state can declare an EEZ even by not being the part of the UNCLOS. Therefore, Turkey declared an EEZ in the Black Sea but not in the Aegean and Mediterranean Seas (FAO: Decree by the Turkish Cabinet of Ministers).

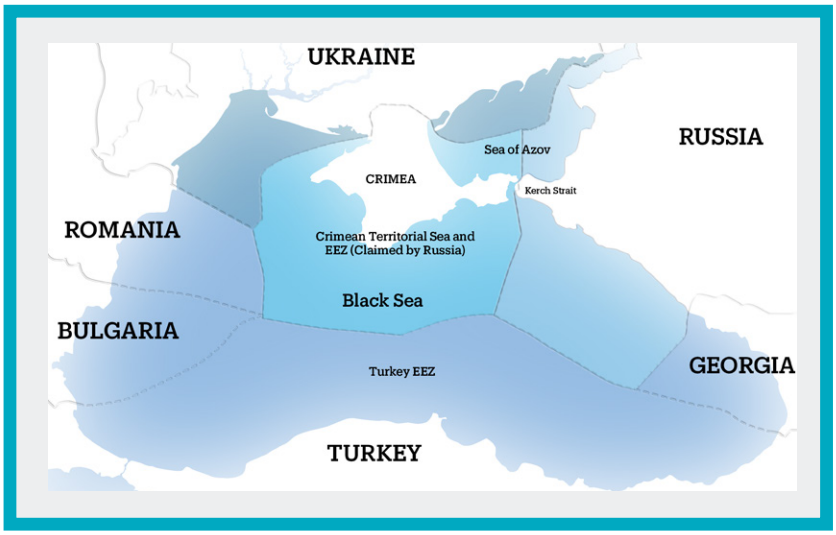



***Figure 2, Black Sea Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and Maritime Delimitations for each coastal country***

# Turkish Position

The Eastern Mediterranean states unilaterally declared their respective EEZs with bilateral agreements, which disregards the rights of the other countries in the region, albeit Articles 59 and 74 of the UNCLOS state the necessity of a respectful approach to international law in order to achieve the principle of equity in the declaration of the EEZ. This is the major problem for Turkey, which claims that the coastal countries need to consult each other to find the common ground for the EEZ borders based on the equity principle.

According to Turkish Foreign Ministry documents, the absence of a delimitation agreement between Turkey and Greece is the basis for the disagreement in the Aegean continental shelf (MFA Turkey). The ongoing debate on the sovereignty rights and maritime

[2] https://www.ecolex.org/details/legislation/decree-by-the-council-of-ministers-no-8611264-lex-faoc005141/

> "In cases where this Convention does not attribute rights or jurisdiction to the coastal State or other States within the exclusive economic zone, and conflict arises between the interests of the coastal State and any other State or States, the conflict should be resolved on the basis of equity and in the light of all the relevant circumstances, taking into account the respective importance of the interests involved to the parties as well as to the international community as a whole." (Article 59, UNCLOS, 1982)

> "The delimitation of the exclusive economic zone between States with opposite or adjacent coasts shall be effected by agreement on the basis of international law, as referred to in Article 38 of the Statute of the International Court of Justice, in order to achieve an equitable solution." (Clause 1, Article 74, UNCLOS, 1982)

boundaries of the Aegean islands form a dispute over the areas beyond the six-mile territorial sea in the Aegean. The unsolved problem in the Aegean not only stokes military tensions between two NATO allies, but also prevents Turkey from signing the third maritime law (UNCLOS). Turkey's absence as a party of the UNCLOS prevents the implementation of the law in the case of Cyprus since the maritime law requires guarantors to be signatories of the agreement.

On 21 September 2011, the Continental Shelf Delamination Agreement was signed between Turkey and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) in New York during the UNGA (MFA Turkey, 2011). This agreement is exclusive because Ankara did not sign any other continental shelf delimitation or EEZ agreement with any other East Mediterranean state yet, believing in an equitable deal that respects international law and is fair for all. Turkey, in several Verbal Notes such as 2004 Turkuno DT /4739, 2005 Turkuno DT/16390 and UN.Doc A/61/1011-S/2007/456, has voiced the necessity of an equitable deal signed by all parties in the region.

Turkey argues that any delimitation attempts on the western shores of Cyprus would directly affect existing legal sovereign rights under the ab initio and ipso facto[1] principles of international law. Therefore, Turkey does not recognise the delimitation agreement between Greek Cyprus and Egypt.

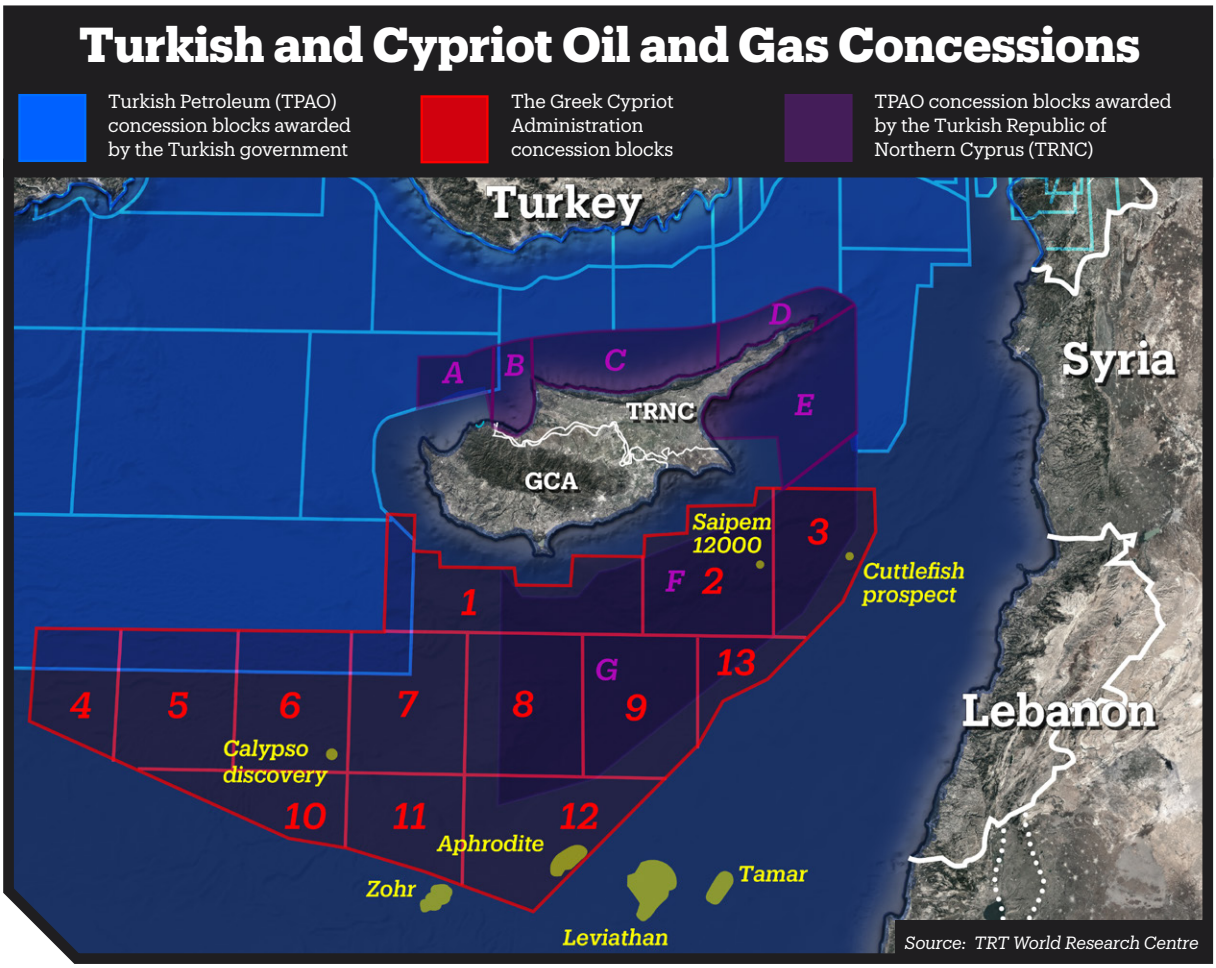
The main legal position of Ankara is based on the promotion of the "equity principle" and consideration of the special circumstances in the delimitation. UNCLOS created an advantageous position for Turkey by replacing the "equidistance rule"[2] with the "equitable solution"[3] principle in the content of Articles 74 and 83. However, Turkey as a non-signatory of the treaty may not appeal to international arbitration using the clauses that it may favour in cases such as Kastellorizo (Meis) or the EEZ of Cyprus.

[1] "From the beginning" and "by the fact". Both principles mean that there is no necessity for the coastal state to declare its continental shelf for the possession of the continental shelf is recognized as a natural right.
[2] In claims of maritime boundaries, the principle of equidistance is a legal concept that the maritime boundaries of a nation should conform to a median line equidistant from neighbouring nations' shores.
[3] "The requirement of an equitable solution is part of the fundamental rule in general international law as incorporated in Articles 74 and 83 of the LOS Convention's constitutional rule of maritime boundary delimitation. An equitable solution or result consists of a boundary line that relies on the conceptual and valuational elements. Within the window of delimitation, the allocation of space and resources is based on a test of the closest relationship. Such a relationship is defined mainly in geographical terms, but also by considerations of efficient management and conservation of resources, fiscal revenues, preservation of security interests, the preservation of free naval communication, and the protection of the livelihood of coastal fishing communities, an element which may also include aspects of political and cultural identity." (Cottier, 2015)

# The Case of Cyprus

Turkey's main disagreement with the Greek-Cypriot administration on the Eastern Mediterranean issue is about offshore areas located in the west and southeast of the island. The Greek-Cypriot Administration made maritime deals and signed border treaties with various neighbouring countries, namely Israel and Egypt. However, Turkey refused to accept these agreements for several reasons, the first being that Turkish non-recognition of the Republic of Cyprus as a sovereign state with full control over the island and its proclaimed EEZ. Second, if we consider the Turks in the north, the Greek Cypriot government is not the legitimate representative of the whole of the island. Finally, Turkey and the TRNC argue that explorations by Greek Cypriot licensed companies are damaging the peace talks. Turkey has been pushing for possible joint exploration or joint profit from the hydrocarbon reserves. If the joint ventures are rejected, Ankara proposes the suspension of all reserve exploration related offshore activities until a deal can be reached.

Until the discovery of hydrocarbon potential off Cyprus, peace negotiations were mainly centred on issues of political authority, security and social



problems caused by an ethnic imbalance. However, especially after the discovery of the Aphrodite gas field, the talks started to focus on energy security and the question of sovereignty over resource exploration, exploitation and monetisation. In 2012, Turkey stated that the Turkish Cypriots 'have equal and inherent rights over the natural resources located on the whole continental shelf of the island' (Lakes, 2012). A year later, speaking in the Chatham House, Mevlut Cavusoglu - then the Deputy Chairman for Foreign Affairs (AKP) - openly said that the TRNC must be included in any future exploitation of oil and gas, including Aphrodite (Cavusoglu, 2013).

On 8 February 2018, Italian company ENI and French company Total announced a new finding in the Calypso exploration block. The discovery is estimated to be at least big as Egypt's Zohr field. While it can be seen as good news for the energy sector and business in the region, alarm bells started to ring with regards to the status quo in Cyprus. Three days after the announcement, the Turkish navy stopped a drilling ship belonging to Italian ENI from heading to Block 3 of the self-declared EEZ of the Greek-Cypriot Administration. Turkey's stance on the issue is clearly against any kind of penetration of the disputed waters between Turkey, TRNC and the Greek-Cypriot Administration before a final peace deal on the Cyprus issue is reached.

Turkish warnings for Greek Cypriot administration, Greece, and foreign companies exploring offshore of Cyprus came from Turkish President Erdogan himself. He stated the Turkish forces are ready to step in in case of any provocation against the TRNC or Turkish maritime borders: "Right now, our warships, air force and other security units are following developments in the region closely with the authority to make any kind of intervention if necessary." (Deutsche Welle, 2018). On 19 October 2018, speaking at the opening of the STAR refinery - the biggest foreign direct investment made in Turkey - President Erdogan said that any ex parte involvement in the hydrocarbon fields in Cypriot waters is "doomed to fail." It was also a reply to the Greek navy's harassment of Türkiye Petrolleri AŞ's exploration ship Barbaros Hayreddin Paşa just a day before the opening of the STAR petroleum refinery. Along with Fatih, the first drilling ship launched in May, Barbaros is one of the ships in the Eastern Mediterranean belonging to the Turkish energy firm.

Turkey has been a significant energy importer for years. The country's increasing energy needs have forced the Turkish government to seek alternatives, and in this case, the vast resource potential of the Turkish and Cypriot waters became a strategic objective. Therefore, the discovery of Calypso in Greek-Cypriot Block 6, which clashes with Turkish EEZ demands, fuelled Turkish ambitions and increased Ankara's attention to Cyprus.

However, Ankara's attention is not merely limited to the island. Turkey has ambitions of becoming a major Eurasian energy hub between the East Mediterranean, the Caspian Sea, the Middle East, and Europe. This geostrategic advantage can benefit Turkey in various ways such as the transit profit, new chemical refineries, major foreign investments and stronger hand in diplomatic relations.

# Greek Claims

Greece and Greek-Cyprus demand a different solution for the delimitation of the maritime boundaries in the Aegean and East Mediterranean in contrast to the Turkish proposal. The main Greek claim for the delimitation issue is to solve the problem within the principle of equidistance without prioritising any possible special circumstances. Greek claims are mainly based on Article 121 of the UNCLOS, which gives full rights to claim the continental shelf and EEZ for the islands.

Rejection of the "special circumstances" is the main determining point for the case. Articles 74 and 83 of UNCLOS state that the solution should be based on mutual respect between states with opposite or adjacent coasts and proposes "equitable solution" instead of the "equidistance principle" for the delimitation of EEZ and continental shelf respectively.

Besides the yet unanswerable delimitation question in the Aegean Sea, there is another significant geographic case, which still occupies the agenda due to its high importance for the final decision of the maritime border in the East Mediterranean. Kastellorizo (Meis), a Greek island located just 2.1 km from the Turkish mainland, continues to be one of the main points in the talks between Greece and Turkey. The crisis related to Kastellorizo became significant when Greece protested Turkey's declaration of the south of the island as the new exploration region for natural resources in 2011. Based on Article 121 of UNCLOS, Greece claims that Kastellorizo has full right to exercise jurisdiction over its EEZ, which clashes with Turkish demands. The so-called "Seville Map" prepared by the University of Seville and commissioned by the European Union, uses Kastellorizo as a breaking point to lock Turkey to the Antalya basin and prevents Turkey's further demands for equitable delimitation of the maritime borders of Cyprus or declaration of the Turkish EEZ.

The Greek claim for the EEZ, including Kastellorizo, represents a potential threat to Turkish interests in both the Aegean and East Mediterranean. EEZ bound-

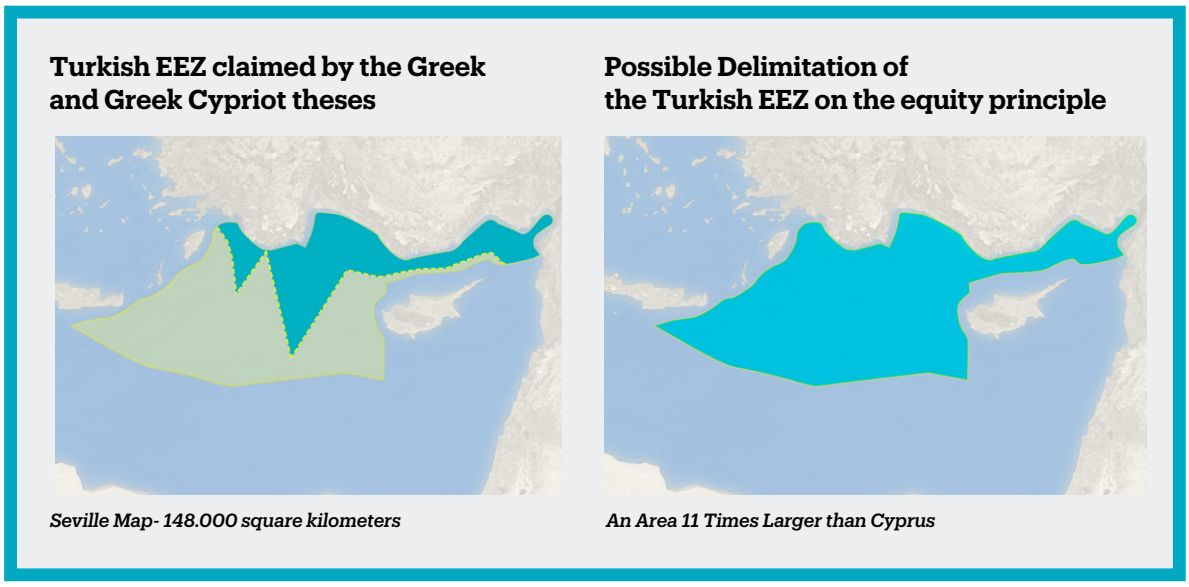



*Figure 3, Maritime Jurisdiction Zones in East Mediterranean*

aries for the island can create an exemplary case for the Greek islands in the Aegean, which means a significant decrease in Turkish naval control in both seas - since Greece owns hundreds of islands - even where some of them are close to the Turkish mainland. Therefore, Greece has a sovereignty concern in case of the possible decision in favour of Turkey on the Kastellorizo question.

If we consider the enormous potential hydrocarbon wealth in the region, we can understand the importance of an EEZ declaration for the islands. The Greek EEZ and continental shelf claim for Kastellorizo will not only create an exemplary case for the future delimitation between Greece and Turkey but will also restrict the Turkish quest for exploration and resource extraction in the Eastern Mediterranean. Furthermore, Greece enjoys significant support from the US and the EU because of its geostrategic importance, the possibility of further securitisation of European energy dependency, and most importantly it's being a signatory of UNCLOS, which in this case can guarantee maritime borders and the EEZ of the EU itself, considering Cyprus is a full member of the EU as well.

The Greek Cypriot Administration, which also fell into the same austerity measures as Greece, is seeking the lion's share of the wealth under the seabed. Just like Athens, Nicosia also wants to seek a way out of financial difficulties through, a) becoming a main energy hub for the distribution of natural gas in East Mediterranean which will include building an LNG terminal, and b) securing the EU and the US support for possible future political and economic instabilities.

Nicosia understands that Turkey's heavy involvement in the equation by offering cheaper and safer transit for natural gas can obstruct its dreams of being a "New Gulf" of the region. Furthermore, if Turkish demands for equitable delimitation can find their reflection on the map, the current maritime border proposal of Greece would be invalid and the prospects of a Greek EEZ bordering Cypriot waters could be relegated to the dustbin of history. Thus, the only advantage held by Greece and the Greek Cypriots is their signatories in UNCLOS and backing by the other powers, which share a similar interest in the further alienation of Turkey in the region and in profiting from the monetisation of the natural resources.

# Example Cases

Questions about the role of islands have their special and important place in international maritime law. International treaties, including UNCLOS, give islands the right to have a continental shelf. However, the right to have a continental shelf and the declaration of an EEZ for the specific islands are mostly decided on the basis of special circumstances, which may include geographic, economic and socio-political realities. On the other hand, there are some cases where disputes among states on the delimitation based on the islands' continental shelf are appealed to international arbitration.

## 1992 Canada vs French Saint-Pierre & Miquelon

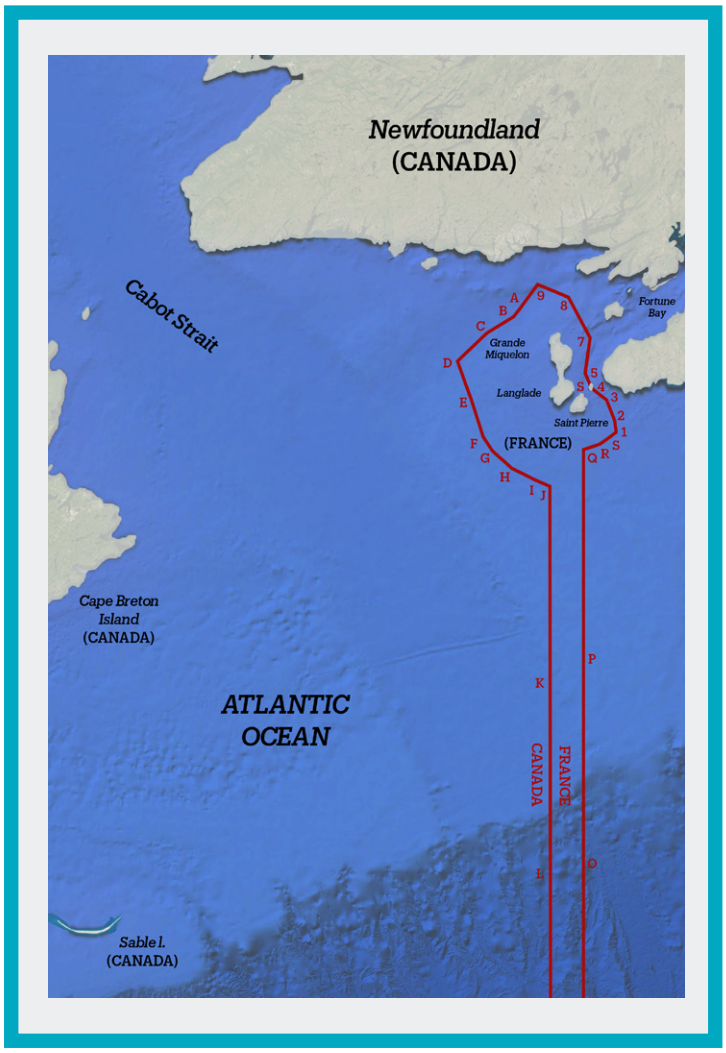



*Figure 4, Canada-France (St. Pierre & Miquelon) Territorial Sea Agreement: 1972 ad hoc Arbitral Award: 1992*

The International Court of Justice (ICJ) stated that geographic factors are fundamental for the delimitation in the case between Canada and French St. Pierre & Miquelon.

Particularly with the adoption of the distance factor in determining continental shelf width, the restriction line restricts or closes the maritime jurisdictions of another country. The International Court of Justice's judgment of the Canadian-French dispute that the restriction of the maritime area, which is consistent with the mainland of one country in relation to the maritime jurisdiction of another country, is contrary to the principle of equity. In the Canadian-French case, the Court did not give the French Islands near the coast of Canadian territorial waters jurisdiction extending southwest. As a rationale, it showed that this would cut off the maritime areas of the Canadian coast.

In the Canadian-French Saint Pierre & Miquelon case, the court did not give the French Islands close to the Canadian coast as much effect as the maritime jurisdictions granted to the mainland

# 2009 Romania vs Ukraine

The case of Ukraine and Romania further illustrates the decisions on the delimitation of maritime jurisdictions.

The location of the Ukraine-owned Serpent Island on the Black Sea is 30 miles from the end of the Ukrainian-Romanian land border on the edge of the Black Sea.

After a disagreement between the two countries on the possible continental shelf / EEZ extension of Serpent Island, Romania appealed to the ICJ on 16 September 2004. The ICJ declared its decision on 3 February 2009.

The ICJ took into consideration the previous border agreements between the two countries, without considering continental shelf/EEZ agreements. During the conclusion of previous agreements, the court examined whether the countries declared that they had abandoned the waters beyond the claimed territorial waters in the past.

The court decided that the Ukraine-owned Serpent Island's territorial waters must determine the continental shelf / EEZ delimitations. Furthermore, the ICJ did not grant any extra maritime jurisdiction beyond the island's territorial waters.

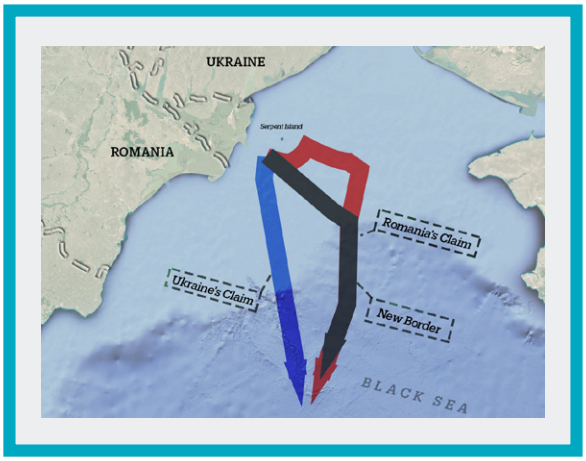



***Figure 5, Maritime delimitation between Ukraine and Romania over the dispute on the Serpent Island***

In conclusion, international law favoured an equitable solution over proportionality in the delimitation and decided to grant maritime jurisdiction to Serpent Island in accordance with its territorial waters.

# 2012 Bangladesh vs Myanmar

On 14 March 2012, the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (ITLOS) delimited the maritime jurisdiction of St. Martin's Island of Bangladesh to its territorial waters. The case was a long-running dispute between Myanmar and Bangladesh, where the island hosts a Bangladeshi Naval base, in addition to being a popular tourist destination. The island is home to almost 4000 people and is only 36 km2 in size. ITLOS used the ICJ's decision on the Ukrainian-Romanian Serpent Island case as an example and decided to honour the "special circumstances" such as the geographic location of the island on the basis of equity principle.

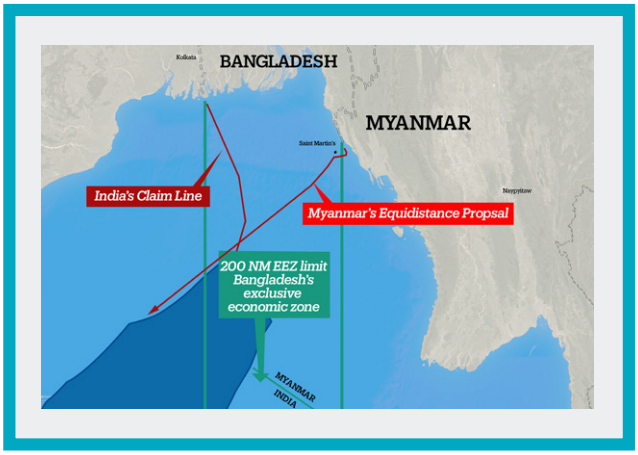



***Figure 6, Maritime delimitation between Myanmar and Bangladesh over the dispute on the St. Martin's Island***

# 2012 Nicaragua vs Colombia

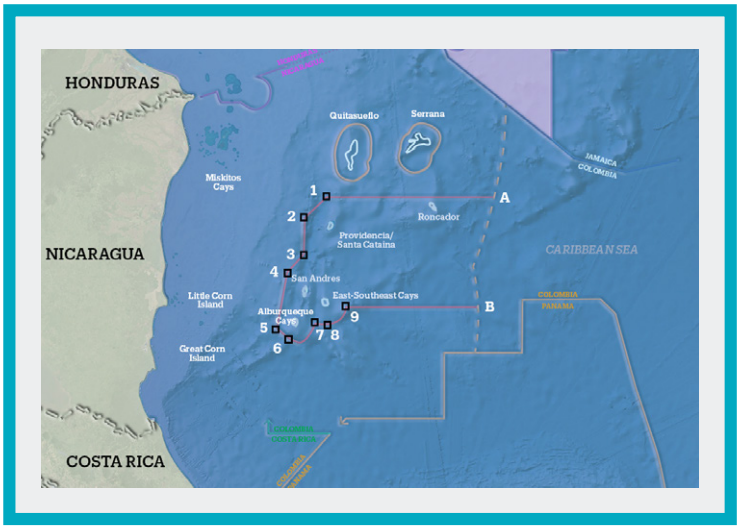



*Figure 7, Decision of the ICJ on 2012 Nicaragua v Colombia maritime dispute*

The dispute between Nicaragua and Colombia - making exception for the fact that the distance from the mainland is more than 400 nautical miles - bears similarities to the dispute between Turkey and Greece in the Aegean and East Mediterranean such as the issue of sovereignty, geographical features, and the limitation of the role given to the islands.

Nicaragua argued that in accordance with the relevant characteristics of the region, the equidistance principle should be implemented and that a single sea border should be set and no effect/half effect should be given when delimiting the sea area to the islands of Colombia. On the other hand, Colombia claimed that the boundary line should be determined by an equidistant line to be drawn between the islands in front to the mainland of Nicaragua and the islands under the sovereignty of Nicaragua.

The Court unanimously decided that approximately 75% of the area of the sea, up to 200 nautical miles from the mainland of Nicaragua, would be given to Nicaragua. The decision aimed to achieve a fair solution, limited the effect of the islands to maritime delimitation, while some islands were not given effect outside of their territorial waters, and prevented the projection of the mainland from creating a cut-off effect.

# What must Turkey do to Strengthen Its Position

To overcome foreign pressure and to state a clear legal position, Turkey must declare an EEZ in the Eastern Mediterranean. As mentioned above, Turkey is not a part of the UNCLOS, which states the procedures of maritime regulation for the declaration of an EEZ. However, Turkey can simply declare its own EEZ without becoming a signatory to any treaty, as it did in the Black Sea.

Secondly, Turkey must break the deadlock of isolation in the Eastern Mediterranean and progress to a new phase in its foreign policy. Analyses show that the main claims against the Turkish position are made by either Greece or the Greek-Cypriot administration. However, because of poor relations between Turkey and other coastal states in the region, most are in favour of the Greek and the Greek-Cypriot claim, even if it means a disadvantage for their national interests. For example, Egypt, Lebanon and Israel face a loss of over 30.000 km2 of sea to Cyprus because of the non-proportional distribution of maritime jurisdiction and EEZ. Therefore, Turkey should try to convince its neighbours of the significance of the delimitation on the basis of eq-

uity and state its readiness to sign bilateral agreements to determine mutual coasts.

Additionally, Turkey should increase its presence and exploration activities in the region. Besides creating a strong drilling presence in the East Mediterranean, Ankara can generate support from the scientific community and through public diplomacy. Exploration for possible future extraction can be the best way to have a stronger hand in the game and to protect the interests of Turkish Cypriots as well. Furthermore, considering the priority of national interests, Turkey should be ready to protect its exploration ships with its navy in order to reflect determination and unity for the cause.

A recent memorandum of understanding signed between Ankara and the UN-recognized government in Tripoli on the maritime jurisdiction agreement is a huge step against Greek claims since it breaks down argued inseparability between Greek and Greek-Cypriot waters (Daily Sabah, 2019). The memorandum claims that both the Turkish and Libyan governments recognize their respective opposite shores. Therefore, the result that came after meeting of President Erdogan of Turkey and Fayez al-Sarraj, the head of the Tripoli-based Government of National Accord (GNA) gives a clear chance to Turkey to further push for solution in the East Mediterranean and build fundaments of the future declaration of possible EEZ in the equity basis (AA, 2019).

Alternatively, the President of the Turkish Association for Energy Economics, Professor Gurkan Kumbaraoglu, suggested the foundation of a "Northeastern Mediterranean Gas Forum," focused on the TRNC and led by Turkey (Yeni Şafak, 2019). He argues that Turkey should respond to the East Mediterranean Gas Forum - formed by Greece, Italy, GKRY, Jordan, Israel, Egypt, Jordan and the Palestinian Authority in early 2019 - which isolated Turkey and the TRNC from the natural gas monetisation cooperation, by forming its own alliance and transfer its energy investments to the Mediterranean. Therefore, Turkey's national interests deem the usage of diplomatic channels possible, but also require it to keep its hard power ready.

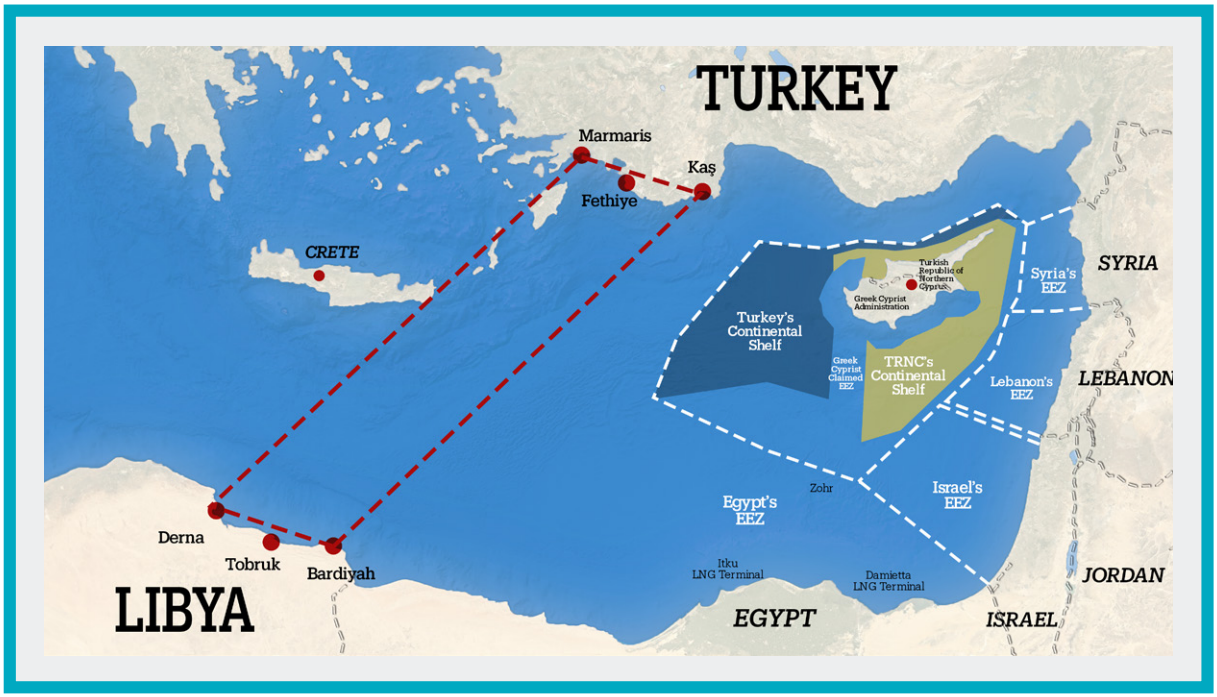



*Figure 8, Memorandum of understanding between Turkey and Libya on the maritime jurisdiction agreement*

# Conclusion

The Levantine basin holds hydrocarbon resources which can be exported to, and consequently diversify, the European market. However, feasibility, prices and security remain matters of concern. Discovered natural gas resources can help transform the energy-deprived region, however, the overall costs of the venture need to be carefully calculated. There are a number of issues which do not lend much hope for the immediate resolution of the East Mediterranean energy question. In addition to the ongoing war in Syria, Lebanon and Israel have so far been unable to solve their maritime dispute, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict remains unresolved, and Cyprus remains divided, while Egypt, the Greek Cypriot administration, Greece, and Israel are trying to create a cooperative alliance without Turkey in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Turkey will continue standing for both its and the TRNC's maritime rights. However, it should also consider the ongoing political processes and advantages of other shareholders in the Mediterranean. The Greek Cypriots are currently taking advantage of the status-quo and continue to grant rights for exploration, thereby escalating tensions in the region. Conversely, the TRNC is currently unable to benefit from a rightful division of natural gas between the Island's two communities. If a rightful division is ensured, it could act as an icebreaker and lead to greater cooperation while allowing the rest of the island to establish necessary economic ties with the international community.

Therefore, the importance of the maritime delimitation based on equity and caring about the possibility of special geographic, economic and socio-political circumstances becomes more important considering the current political climate. Greek claims in the Eastern Mediterranean could cost Turkey the loss of almost 148.000 km2 due to the differences between the Seville Map and the possible Turkish EEZ claim.

Only time and the right steps will show what the equilibrium between major energy companies and countries' emerging and aggressive foreign policies will be. In the meantime, the clock is ticking while exploration and exploitation continue.

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