Corridors of Power: The Strategic Stakes of the Türkiye–Libya Deal

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(Hazem Turkia - Anadolu Agency)

The 2019 Türkiye–Libya Maritime Delimitation Agreement is a landmark in Eastern Mediterranean geopolitics, securing extensive Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) for both countries and unlocking potential access to vast offshore hydrocarbon reserves. Rooted in solid international legal principles and registered with the United Nations, the deal has reshaped regional power dynamics, challenged exclusionary energy projects, and opened the door to joint exploration and economic cooperation. With recent signs of political consensus emerging in Libya and growing trilateral engagement with Italy, the agreement now stands as both a strategic safeguard and a catalyst for new partnerships in energy, security, and regional stability. This policy outlook explores the legal foundations, geopolitical motivations, and evolving implications of the agreement, offering a comprehensive assessment of its role in reshaping the Eastern Mediterranean order.

Introduction

The 2019 maritime delimitation agreement between Türkiye and Libya represents a pivotal moment in the geopolitics of the Eastern Mediterranean. Signed between Türkiye and Libya's internationally recognised Government of National Accord (GNA), the agreement delineates Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) between the two countries, granting them significant sovereign rights over potentially hydrocarbon-rich maritime areas. With natural gas reserves in the region estimated at around $700 billion, the strategic and economic implications of this agreement extend well beyond bilateral interests, reshaping regional dynamics and energy politics.

Recent developments have added a new dimension to the agreement's significance. In a notable shift, Libya's eastern-based House of Representatives (HoR), which initially opposed the deal, has announced the formation of a technical committee to re-examine the 2019 maritime agreement. Media reports suggest that the HoR is now considering ratifying the accord, a move widely interpreted as part of a broader thaw in relations between Ankara and the eastern Libyan administration. If ratified, this would mark a major turning point by providing unified Libyan support for the agreement, thereby enhancing its political weight and implementation prospects.

The agreement itself emerged in response to mounting regional tensions and competing maritime claims involving Greece, Egypt, and the Southern Greek Cypriot administration. By establishing a formal maritime boundary with Libya, Türkiye countered exclusionary regional projects such as the EastMed pipeline, which aimed to bypass Turkish participation, which has prompted diplomatic realignments and catalysed deeper Turkish engagement with Libya's internationally recognised government, including energy cooperation and reconstruction initiatives.

Legally, the Türkiye–Libya MoU rests on robust foundations. The GNA, as the sole internationally recognised authority in Libya at the time, was entitled to agree with international law. Subsequent support from the Government of National Unity (GNU) and the agreement's registration with the United Nations under Article 102 of the UN Charter further affirm its validity.

This research paper critically examines the Türkiye–Libya maritime agreement through a multidisciplinary lens, analysing its legal basis, geopolitical motivations, and evolving implications. By exploring the treaty's origins, recent developments, and its potential impact on regional maritime governance, the study seeks to offer a comprehensive assessment of this landmark diplomatic initiative and its role in reshaping the Eastern Mediterranean order.

Towards Consensus: Türkiye, Libya, and the Prospects of Ratification

Media reports recently surfaced that Libya's eastern parliament, a.k.a. House of Representatives (HoR), was considering ratifying a maritime agreement with Türkiye that grants Ankara and Tripoli access to a vast economic zone in the Mediterranean.

The HoR has decided to establish a technical committee to re-examine the 2019 maritime deal. The move is seen as part of a recent thaw in relations between Ankara and the eastern Libyan administration. If the HoR ratifies the 2019 agreement, it will present a turning point that will have a significant impact on the energy geopolitics of the Eastern Mediterranean for years to come.

(Republic of Türkiye Ministry of National Defense- Anadolu Agency)

The Tripoli government and Türkiye signed the maritime boundary agreement in 2019, which delineated exclusive economic zones in the eastern Mediterranean. In 2022, the two sides expanded the deal with a memorandum granting Türkiye exploration rights both offshore and on Libyan territory.

When the agreement was signed in 2019 between Türkiye and Libya's internationally recognised Government of National Accord (GNA) in Tripoli, the House of Representatives strongly opposed the agreement at the time. This agreement sought to create a joint Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) in the Mediterranean, providing Libya and Türkiye with broad maritime rights. The deal angered some neighbouring countries, among them Greece and Egypt. Athens and Ankara have a longstanding dispute over oil and gas reserves and drilling operations off the coast of the divided island of Cyprus.

The approval of the agreement by the HoR would not be merely symbolic. A unified stance among Libya's rival factions in support of the deal could encourage Türkiye to begin seismic surveys and drilling operations in practice, at least without triggering a domestic crisis in Libya.

Such a move would challenge the Greece-Egypt bilateral maritime agreement and might even prompt Cairo to pursue a similar arrangement with Türkiye, potentially extending Egypt's exclusive economic zone through an agreement with Ankara. For instance, recently, Libya's National Oil Company (NOC) signed a memorandum of understanding with the Turkish state oil company TPAO to conduct a geological and geophysical study of four offshore areas.

The maritime agreement between Libya and Türkiye goes beyond symbolic diplomacy by demonstrating concrete strategic and economic collaboration. The NOC's memorandum of understanding with the Turkish state oil company TPAO for geological and geophysical studies of four offshore areas represents a tangible first step in practical exploration. By potentially unifying Libya's rival factions around this agreement, Türkiye gains an opportunity to conduct seismic surveys and drilling operations without internal Libyan opposition. This approach suggests a pragmatic engagement that could unlock significant economic potential in the Mediterranean's hydrocarbon resources, transforming the maritime boundary agreement from a political document into a substantive framework for joint energy development and economic cooperation.

It is imperative to note that despite close collaboration between Ankara and Tripoli, Türkiye has also been pursuing reconciliation with the eastern factions. Turkish President Erdoğan's meetings with Aguila Saleh, the Tobruk-based parliament speaker and a Haftar supporter, in August 2022 and December 2023 signify Türkiye's willingness to engage with the country's eastern region. This move indicates that Ankara is no longer viewed with hostility by the Eastern part of the country, but rather as a potential partner, particularly in areas such as completing unfinished construction projects in Benghazi and contributing to the country's reconstruction. Therefore, the potential ratification of the 2019 agreement reflects ongoing efforts by both sides to strengthen their relationship and enhance cooperation.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan (C) meets Speaker of the House of Representatives of Libya, Aguila Saleh Issa (L) and Deputy Head of the Presidential Council of Libya Abdullah Al-Lafi (R) at Presidential Complex in Ankara, Turkiye on August 02, 2022. (Murat Kula - Anadolu Agency)

Libya occupies a central role in Türkiye's Mediterranean strategy, serving as a gateway for Ankara's regional ambitions and a platform for projecting influence.

Türkiye has been involved in a dispute with neighbouring countries over the delimitation of maritime boundaries and the exploration of natural resources in the region. This has led to increased tensions and a desire for Türkiye to secure its interests in Libya, as it sees the country as a strategic gateway to assert its influence and protect its claims in the Eastern Mediterranean. The search for natural resources in the East Mediterranean Sea is of great strategic importance to Türkiye, attracting the interest of both regional and national stakeholders.

Rivalries, fluid alliances, and strategic manoeuvring have long marked the Mediterranean. According to the U.S. Geological Survey, the Eastern Mediterranean contains natural gas worth approximately $700 billion. The recent discovery of major natural gas reserves has intensified competition among nations seeking to meet their energy demands and expand their regional influence. As a result, maritime boundary disputes have escalated, turning the Eastern Mediterranean into a focal point of geopolitical tension.

The discovery of natural gas reserves prompted regional and international actors to increase exploration in Mediterranean waters. It sparked competition and cooperation among countries to secure their share of these resources and establish strategic partnerships for future energy cooperation.

This competition led to new alliances and geopolitical dynamics in the region. Countries like Türkiye, Libya, Greece, Egypt, Israel and the Greek Cypriot administration became key players in this energy race as they sought to assert their territorial claims and protect their interests in the Mediterranean Greece, Egypt, and Greek Cypriot administration have acted against Türkiye due to the dispute in the usage of offshore waters within the Mediterranean Sea.

In January 2020, an important development occurred in the geopolitical landscape of the Eastern Mediterranean region, as Greece, the Greek Cypriot administration, and Israel came together to formalise their commitment to the East Med pipeline project. The primary objective of this project is to establish a linkage between the energy sources in the East Mediterranean region and Europe, but excluding Türkiye and North Cyprus, to secure their offshore pipeline.

The EastMed pipeline project initially had the backing of the United States; however, in 2022, Washington withdrew its support. One key issue was that the pipeline would bypass Türkiye, the most feasible route for a Mediterranean pipeline, thereby raising geopolitical concerns. Additionally, the project faced criticism for being economically unviable and technically challenging. Experts argue that the high construction costs would be difficult to justify, especially at a time when the EU is aiming to become climate neutral by 2050, making large-scale fossil fuel infrastructure projects increasingly hard to defend.

Türkiye regards the maritime agreement with Libya as a way to effectively fence off disputed areas of the Eastern Mediterranean and possibly prevent other countries from taking advantage of the region's resources without consulting with or including Türkiye in the process. In other words, the agreement, regarded as a game-changer for the region, has become a means for Türkiye to push back against attempts to isolate it in the Eastern Mediterranean.

A Legal Instrument in a Disputed Sea: Unpacking the Türkiye–Libya MoU

The bilateral Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between Türkiye and Libya on maritime jurisdiction in the Eastern Mediterranean is geopolitically significant, as it seeks to preserve the rights of both countries in the region. It also represents a landmark achievement in international law by offering a new framework for maritime boundary agreements.

Beyond its immediate political and economic impacts, this agreement has sparked extensive debate, intersecting critical principles such as the law of the sea, sovereign equality of states, treaty law, and constitutional ratification processes.

A view of Turkey's drillship 'Yavuz' operating in the Mediterranean Sea on August 07, 2019. (Celal Güneş- Anadolu Agency)

At its essence, this MoU is based on the coastal adjacency of Türkiye and Libya, formally delimiting their maritime boundaries in the Mediterranean. This initiative, undertaken amid ongoing regional tensions, reflects a decisive political action and constitutes a robust legal instrument aimed at safeguarding the maritime rights of both states against unilateral fait accompli in the region.

Through this agreement, Türkiye and Libya established and proclaimed their respective Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) in the Eastern Mediterranean, thereby securing their sovereign entitlement to marine resources by contemporary legal frameworks. The MoU is also intended to act as a counterbalance, shielding both countries from exclusionary measures regarding resource allocation and cooperation mechanisms within the region.

Nonetheless, this consequential legal and political initiative has drawn various objections, often politically motivated yet formulated under the pretext of international law. These critiques primarily accuse Türkiye and Libya of violating international norms through the MoU. Consequently, the situation must be analysed and articulated through the lens of international legal principles, not only to address the validity of such allegations but also to underscore the agreement's substantial compatibility with prevailing standards and normative frameworks in international law.

The Concept of Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs)

At the heart of the Türkiye-Libya agreement lies the legal regime of the EEZs, primarily governed by the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). The EEZ refers to a maritime zone extending up to 200 nautical miles from the coastal baseline, within which a coastal state exercises sovereign rights to explore, exploit, conserve, and manage both living and non-living natural resources. These rights also include activities related to the production of energy from water, currents, and winds. While the UNCLOS has codified the EEZ regime, the underlying principle that coastal states may declare an EEZ—thereby acquiring associated rights and jurisdictional entitlements derives not solely from treaty law, but also from customary international law. In this respect, the ability to declare an EEZ is recognised as a well-established customary right, independent of a state's ratification of the UNCLOS. Thus, coastal states that are not parties to the Convention, such as Türkiye and Libya, nonetheless retain the legal authority to declare an EEZ and to exercise the rights accorded under international law. Indeed, numerous states declared valid EEZs even prior to the entry into force of the UNCLOS, further reinforcing the customary nature of this right. Consequently, objections claiming that Türkiye and Libya cannot declare an EEZ due to their non-party status to the UNCLOS lack any solid legal foundation. On the contrary, both states are fully entitled under customary international law to define and delimit maritime zones, including the EEZs, and to exercise the jurisdictional and economic rights that follow.

Objections to the Treaty-Making Authority of Libyan Officials

Another line of objection directed at the Türkiye-Libya maritime delimitation agreement concerns the legitimacy of the Libyan signatories, arguing that due to the alleged lack of proper authorisation of those who signed the agreement on behalf of Libya, the memorandum cannot produce valid legal effects under international law.

During the negotiation process, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan represented the Turkish side, and Türkiye's Minister of Foreign Affairs signed the agreement. On the Libyan side, the negotiations were conducted under the authority of Fayez al-Sarraj, in his capacity as head of the Government of National Accord (GNA), the internationally recognised government of Libya. Libya's Foreign Minister also signed the agreement.

From the Turkish perspective, the involvement of President Erdoğan and the Foreign Minister in the negotiation and signing of the agreement raises no legal concern under international law. According to Article 7 of the 1969 Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties (VCLT), heads of state, heads of government, and ministers for foreign affairs are universally recognised, by their functions and customary international practice, as possessing the authority to represent their states in the conclusion of treaties without the need for exceptional credentials.

On the other hand, although the Libyan case appears more complex due to the country's ongoing internal conflict and fragmented governance structures, the situation in fact presents a straightforward legal picture. At the time the agreement was signed, Fayez al-Sarraj was the internationally recognised head of Libya's Government of National Accord. Therefore, his authority to conduct treaty negotiations and to delegate the signing of the agreement to his foreign minister is entirely consistent with international legal norms. This legitimacy rests primarily on the fact that the GNA had been recognised by the international community, particularly the United Nations and the UN Security Council, as the sole legitimate executive authority in Libya. Notably, UN Security Council Resolution 2259 (2015) expressly endorsed the GNA as Libya's only legitimate governing body and called on all UN Member States and international organisations to engage exclusively with the GNA in official matters, thereby affirming its authority to represent Libya at the international level. In addition, numerous statements and documents issued by key international actors, including the UN Secretary-General and the European Union, have repeatedly reaffirmed the GNA's status as the lawful representative of the Libyan state in international affairs.

Hence, the memorandum of understanding signed by Fayez al-Sarraj on behalf of Libya constitutes a lawful expression of Libya's sovereign will and legitimate international representation. To argue otherwise would be to disregard both the established norms of international treaty law and the explicit recognition granted by the United Nations and the broader international community. In conclusion, there exists no legal basis to claim a unilateral violation of international law in the signing of the agreement. The authority to sign and the legitimacy of representation were clearly and firmly established through both international customary law and binding UN resolutions.

Objections Based on Island Rights

Another primary legal objection raised forcefully by Greece and the Greek Cypriot Administration concerns the alleged exclusion of certain Greek islands, particularly Crete, Rhodes, Karpathos, and Kastellorizo (also known as Meis), from the maritime jurisdiction areas defined in the Türkiye-Libya agreement. Critics argue that by not recognising these islands' entitlement to their EEZs, the agreement violates their sovereign rights and constitutes a breach of the UNCLOS. This criticism necessitates a careful examination of a key issue in the law of the sea: whether islands are entitled to an EEZ under international law.

As a starting point, it is well established in international law particularly through the jurisprudence of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and various arbitral tribunals that islands may, in principle, generate maritime entitlements, including territorial seas, and, under certain conditions, rights to an EEZs and continental shelf, as stipulated in Article 121 of the UNCLOS. However, a critical distinction must be drawn in maritime delimitation cases where islands are situated opposite or adjacent to continental landmasses. In such scenarios, international courts and tribunals have consistently held that granting full effect to islands in delimitation processes does not always produce an equitable result. Consequently, in regions characterised by complex geography, or where small islands are positioned on the "wrong side" between two continental coasts, the tendency has been either to reduce the effect of those islands or to disregard them altogether in determining maritime boundaries.

In other words, although international law unquestionably grants islands full sovereignty over territorial seas, their entitlement to an EEZ is not absolute and may be subject to limitation except in cases where the coastal state itself consists entirely of islands. In disputes involving continental states with islands, such as the case of Greece, international law has firmly established that islands do not automatically possess a full EEZ entitlement that prevails over equitable delimitation principles. Therefore, the claim that the Türkiye-Libya MoU violates international law due to the alleged infringement of the EEZ entitlements of certain Greek islands is legally unfounded. The exclusion or limited effect given to these islands in the context of maritime delimitation does not, in itself, constitute a breach of international law but instead aligns with established jurisprudential and legal standards in the law of the sea.

Assessment of the Agreement's Validity in Light of Domestic Approval and Entry into Force Procedures

Moreover, the validity of the agreement in question also warrants examination from the standpoint of its approval and entry into force within the framework of domestic legal procedures. For an international treaty to produce valid legal effects and become binding on the parties, it is not sufficient that it be negotiated and signed by duly authorised representatives. It must also comply with the ratification and acceptance procedures prescribed by the respective domestic legal systems of the contracting states, and these procedures must be duly completed.

In this context, *ratification* refers to the process by which a state formally expresses its consent to be bound by a treaty, having completed the necessary internal legal procedures. This concept is governed by Articles 14 and 16 of the VCLT. Regarding Türkiye, the constitutional organ vested with treaty ratification authority is the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye (GNAT). Türkiye duly completed its domestic legal process through the enactment of a ratification law by Parliament. It formally brought the MoU into force in December 2019, thereby becoming officially bound by its terms.

On the Libyan side, the GNA announced the entry into force of the MoU in December 2019. In accordance with its internal procedures, the agreement was subsequently published in Libya's *official gazette* in the following year. However, critics have argued that the process was incomplete under Libyan law, pointing to the lack of explicit approval by the House of Representatives (HoR), the GNA's rival legislative body, and thereby claim that the agreement lacks binding effect under international law.

Nonetheless, the validity of such critiques must be assessed in light of Libya's complex political landscape and the international community's position regarding the legitimate authority in Libya at the relevant time. In 2019, when the MoU was signed, the GNA was recognised by the United Nations as the legitimate government of Libya. Although the Tobruk-based HoR wielded significant influence, particularly in eastern Libya, its international recognition was more limited compared to that of the GNA. In practical terms, the GNA exercised effective control over the capital, Tripoli, and much of western Libya, where-as the HoR primarily operated in the east. At the time of the agreement, the two entities were in open rivalry, and a unified, stable central authority was absent. Given these circumstances, it was not realistically feasible to obtain collective approval from all political factions within Libya. The United Nations and the broader international community continued to recognise the GNA as Libya's legitimate representative government at the time. Under international law, the key consideration is which government holds the authority to conclude treaties on behalf of the state in cases of internal division. Therefore, the GNA's ratification of the MoU has been deemed sufficient for international law, particularly in the absence of a unified government and in light of the institutional conflict between the signatory and the rival legislative body.

While the House of Representatives (HoR) holds a degree of legitimacy within Libya's political framework, its lack of endorsement at the time did not diminish the validity of the Türkiye–Libya maritime agreement under international law. This is primarily because the Government of National Accord (GNA) was the sole internationally recognised government at the time the agreement was signed. Moreover, the subsequent Government of National Unity (GNU) expressed its commitment to upholding the agreement, further reinforcing its continuity. Although ratification by the HoR would strengthen the agreement politically and symbolically, its absence does not negate the legal standing of the MoU. In international practice, the recognition of the GNA as the legitimate authority empowered to represent Libya in legal and diplomatic matters formed the basis for the agreement's validity. Therefore, the 2019 Türkiye–Libya maritime delimitation MoU, when considered in the context of Libya's complex political and legal environment, international recognition norms, and the support it received from the United Nations, retains its legal validity under international law. Notably, the agreement was registered with the United Nations on 1 October 2020 in accordance with Article 102 of the UN Charter, further affirming its compliance with international legal standards.

The Validity of the Agreement in Light of Potential Shifts in Political Authority in Libya

A final issue concerning the validity of the agreement relates to the potential implications of political uncertainty in Libya and the emergence of competing centres of authority. In particular, the question arises as to what would become of the agreement should a change in political leadership occur or new actors claim legitimate authority in the country.

Under international law, the termination or suspension of a treaty may occur under three primary circumstances: by mutual consent of the parties, through unilateral action by one of the parties, or as a result of specific fundamental changes in circumstances. Termination by mutual consent, whereby both parties agree that they no longer wish to remain bound by the treaty, presents no legal controversy. Just as states are free to conclude treaties based on their sovereign interests, they are equally free to terminate them through mutual agreement.

The legal complexity arises in cases where one party seeks to terminate a treaty unilaterally, or where unforeseen developments raise questions about the treaty's continued applicability. Unilateral termination generally takes the form of *denunciation*, *withdrawal* or *renunciation*. Denunciation refers to a party's unilateral declaration that it will no longer consider itself bound by a treaty. In the context of multilateral treaties, this act is typically referred to as withdrawal. For a unilateral termination to be valid under international law, at least one of the following conditions must be met: (i) the treaty expressly provides such a right to the parties; (ii) the intention to allow unilateral withdrawal can be reasonably inferred from the terms of the treaty or surrounding circumstances; or (iii) the other party has materially breached its obligations under the treaty. Renunciation, on the other hand, entails a party's decision to forego the benefits or rights conferred by the treaty, without affecting the rights of the other party. Importantly, this does not render the entire treaty void; it merely results in the renouncing party no longer benefiting from the treaty's provisions, while the rights and obligations of the other party remain intact.

Applying these principles to the Türkiye–Libya agreement, it can be asserted that the agreement may indeed be terminated through mutual consent, should the governments in power in both countries reach such a decision. However, the agreement does not contain any explicit clause allowing for unilateral termination. Nor is there any textual or contextual indication that the parties implicitly recognised such a right. On the contrary, statements from both governments emphasise the strategic significance of the agreement for their respective national interests, which undermines any suggestion of an implied intent not to be bound.

As for the possibility of termination arising from a fundamental change of circumstances (*rebus sic stantibus*), international legal doctrine holds that such a change must render the continued performance of the treaty objectively impossible. Even then, customary international law and jurisprudence emphasise that such scenarios typically require the mutual consent of the parties for the treaty's termination, and do not confer a unilateral right of denunciation. Moreover, the threshold for invoking *rebus sic stantibus* is exceptionally high and is limited to exceptional and unforeseeable changes that radically alter the essential basis of consent to be bound. Therefore, while future political or military developments in Libya may significantly differ from the context in which the agreement was initially signed, such developments do not, in themselves, provide either Libya or Türkiye with the unilateral legal authority to terminate the agreement. Under international law, the only lawful pathway for bringing the treaty to an end—regardless of internal political transformations in either state—is through mutual agreement between the parties.

Geopolitical Ramifications

While the Türkiye–Libya Maritime Deal carries undeniable symbolic weight, its real test lies in the long-term material outcomes it can generate. The delineation of Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) under the agreement potentially unlocks access to untapped offshore hydrocarbon reserves, facilitates the development of secure maritime trade routes, and bolsters naval control over strategic sea lines of communication. For Türkiye, the accord represents an opportunity to break the geographic encirclement imposed by competing EEZ claims primarily from Greece and the Greek Cypriot administration, thereby securing a corridor for energy exploration and a stronger foothold in the Eastern Mediterranean's contested waters. Libya, in turn, gains a politically powerful maritime ally at a time when its fractured state institutions limit its capacity to defend or exploit offshore resources independently.

In this win-win calculus, Türkiye has some advantages, as its robust exploration infrastructure, blue-water naval capabilities, and diplomatic leverage position it to fructify the dividends alongside its Libyan partners. The deal gives Ankara both the legal framing and the maritime reach to integrate Eastern Mediterranean energy resources into its broader energy diversification strategy, while reinforcing its role as a gatekeeper for regional trade and security routes. Meanwhile, Libya benefits from enhanced maritime claims and protection, thanks to Türkiye's military and logistical support, which optimises its position.

However, this advantage is not uncontested. Regional actors such as Greece and the Greek Cypriot Administration have already mobilised legal, diplomatic, and security instruments to counter the Türkiye–Libya alignment. Their pushback—ranging from EEZ agreements of their own to expanded naval cooperation with EU and Gulf partners—threatens to complicate exploration plans, deter international investment, and entangle Türkiye in costly maritime stand-offs.

Yet Ankara has shown it is not passively awaiting the fallout. The 1 August 2025 Istanbul summit between Türkiye, Italy, and Libya demonstrated a proactive strategy to dilute potential EU or NATO scrutiny by embedding its maritime and energy agenda within broader cooperative frameworks. By aligning with Italy on migration management, regional security, and energy development—issues of direct political priority for Rome—Ankara reframes its Eastern Mediterranean ambitions as part of a stabilising coalition rather than a unilateral power grab. This trilateral format enables Türkiye to position itself as an indispensable partner in addressing EU concerns on irregular migration and Libyan stability, while protecting its maritime interests.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan receives Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni and Libyan Prime Minister Abdul Hamid Dbeibeh at Dolmabahce Working Office in Istanbul, Turkiye on August 1, 2025. (Turkish Presidency/ Murat Kula- Anadolu Agency)

In this sense, Türkiye's long-term material advantage in the Eastern Mediterranean rests not only on superior exploration capacity and naval reach, but also on its ability to weave these ambitions into multilateral arrangements that neutralise opposition and attract tacit support from key European players. The Istanbul summit signalled that Ankara understands the necessity of coalition building to turn contested legal rights into enforceable, economically viable outcomes—effectively mitigating the external scrutiny that could otherwise blunt its strategic gains.

Conclusion

The Türkiye–Libya Maritime Agreement marks a transformative development in the legal and geopolitical landscape of the Eastern Mediterranean. More than a bilateral accord, it reflects a strategic recalibration of regional power dynamics through the prism of international law, sovereign entitlements, and energy diplomacy.

Legally, the agreement stands on firm ground. It aligns with customary international law governing Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs), and it was duly concluded by the internationally recognised GNA and registered with the United Nations. It affirms the right of coastal states, regardless of UNCLOS ratification status, to delineate maritime boundaries and protect their economic interests.

Politically, the potential ratification by Libya's eastern-based HoR represents a landmark moment, offering the prospect of national consensus around the agreement. Such a move would empower Türkiye to operationalise the deal through seismic surveys and joint energy projects without triggering domestic Libyan opposition. Ankara's increasing engagement with eastern Libyan actors also reflects a broader strategy of cross-factional diplomacy aimed at long-term regional presence.

Critically, the agreement has broader geopolitical implications. By challenging the maritime claims of Greece and the Greek Cypriot Administration, the Türkiye–Libya deal reshapes the Eastern Mediterranean's energy map. Yet, contrary to accusations of unilateralism, Türkiye's actions reflect a strategy of engagement rather than exclusion. Rather than fostering confrontation, Ankara increasingly advocates for bilateral mechanisms and legal clarity as diplomatic tools to resolve maritime disputes—while remaining prepared to assert its rights through hard power if necessary.

This cooperative outlook is evident in Türkiye's evolving relationship with Egypt. The agreement with Libya may well serve as a blueprint for a future maritime delimitation deal between Ankara and Cairo. Such a development would not only enhance bilateral ties but also offer strategic benefits for Egypt, enabling it to expand its maritime claims in a way that complements rather than conflicts with its regional interests. For Cairo, this could mean securing access to larger EEZ areas and unlocking new energy exploration zones, particularly at a time when regional energy security is a national priority.

In this light, the Türkiye - Libya agreement is not merely a geopolitical counterbalance but a potential catalyst for broader regional alignment. It demonstrates how legal instruments, when coupled with diplomatic pragmatism, can create opportunities for joint resource development, strategic cooperation, and stability.

The inclusive trajectory of Türkiye's maritime diplomacy was further underscored by the 1 August 2025 Istanbul summit between Türkiye, Italy, and Libya. This trilateral meeting was not merely symbolic; it demonstrated how Ankara can mitigate external scrutiny and expand the agreement's legitimacy by embedding it within broader cooperative frameworks. By aligning with Rome on critical issues such as migration management, regional security, and energy cooperation, Türkiye effectively reframed the maritime deal from a contested bilateral accord into part of a multilateral stability agenda. Italy's inclusion—driven by its own energy ambitions, Mediterranean transit role, and political need to address migration flows from Libya—created a shared platform where strategic interests converged. This coalition-building approach both blunts potential EU criticism and reinforces Türkiye's image as a constructive regional broker, while giving Libya expanded diplomatic cover for pursuing the agreement's implementation.

Ultimately, this agreement reflects a shift from exclusionary posturing to inclusive negotiation, reinforced by coalition-building efforts such as the August 2025 Türkiye–Italy–Libya summit. By embedding the maritime deal within a wider framework of shared security, energy, and migration interests, Ankara has transformed a contested bilateral arrangement into part of a cooperative regional agenda—one that could reshape maritime governance across the Eastern Mediterranean while opening the door to durable partnerships.

(Mohammed Ertima- Anadolu Agency)