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

Letter dated 1 June 2020 from the Permanent Representative of Greece to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I would like to bring to your attention the following recent information which raises serious concerns as to the situation in the Eastern Mediterranean.

On 30 May 2020, a number of hydrocarbon exploration license applications filed by the State-owned Turkish Petroleum Corporation were published in the *Official Gazette of the Republic of Turkey*. The applications concern areas falling within the Greek continental shelf of the Eastern Mediterranean, south and south-east of the island of Rhodes, south of the islands of Karpathos and Kassos and south-east of the island of Crete (blocks O20, O21, P20, P21, R18, R19, R20, R21, S16, S17, S18, S19, S20, S21, T16, T17, T18, T19, U16, U17, U18, U19, V18, V19).

This license applications procedure is illegal, as it is based on: (a) the purported outer limits of the illegally claimed Turkish continental shelf in the Eastern Mediterranean, defined in letters dated 13 November 2019 ([A/74/550](#)) and 18 March 2020 ([A/74/757](#)) from the Permanent Representative of Turkey to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General, in clear violation of international law; and (b) the so-called memorandum of understanding on delimitation of maritime jurisdiction areas between Turkey and the Government of National Accord-State of Libya, signed on 27 November 2019 (see [A/74/727](#), letter dated 27 February 2020). This illegal procedure confirms Turkey's aims to usurp Greece's ipso facto and ab initio sovereign rights over its continental shelf and to deprive the Greek islands of their maritime zones, in blatant violation of international law, thus fuelling tension and threatening peace and stability in the region.

In this respect, I would like to recall my letters addressed to you, dated 19 February 2020 ([A/74/710-S/2020/129](#)), 19 March 2020 ([A/74/758](#)) and 20 April 2020 ([A/74/819](#)), rejecting these Turkish claims and actions as illegal and the above-mentioned memorandum of understanding as null and void and therefore not having any legal effect on Greece's sovereign rights. Furthermore, Greece hereby reiterates its repeated calls on Turkey to avoid any further illegal action in the future.

My country would like to stress that the above-mentioned illegal license applications procedure has no legal consequences on the sovereign rights of Greece and cannot be invoked against it. Greece has ipso facto and ab initio sovereign rights in the above area of the Eastern Mediterranean on the basis of the United Nations



Convention on the Law of the Sea which reflects customary international law. It should be reiterated that, in accordance with article 121 (2) of the Convention, the Greek islands generate maritime zones (continental shelf/exclusive economic zone), beyond their territorial sea, as other land territory. Accordingly, Greek national legislation (Law No. 2289/1995 as amended by Law No. 4001/2011, registered with the United Nations through note verbale dated 8 May 2012; see *Law of the Sea Bulletin*, vol. 79, p. 14) defines the outer limits of the Greek continental shelf.

Greece strongly protested against and objected to the above license applications procedure which is contrary to international law and called, once again, upon Turkey to respect Greece's sovereign rights and to refrain from any further similar action that contradicts Turkey's statements on purported willingness to establish good neighbourly relations.

In view of the above, I was asked by my Government to bring the matter of this latest Turkish provocation to your attention, as it threatens peace, security and stability in the Eastern Mediterranean.

In addition, the above illegal act underlines even more the importance of not proceeding with the registration of the so-called memorandum of understanding on delimitation of maritime jurisdiction areas between Turkey and the Government of National Accord-State of Libya, as already requested by Greece and other States Members of the United Nations, in corroboration of the reasons presented in my letter dated 9 December 2019, annexed to the letter dated 14 February 2020 (see [A/74/706](#)).

I would be grateful if you would have the present letter circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 74 (a), and published on the website of the Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea and in the next edition of the *Law of the Sea Bulletin*.

(Signed) Maria Theofili
Ambassador
Permanent Representative