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

## Letter dated 29 September 2020 from the Permanent Representative of Greece to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Upon instructions from my Government, I have the honour to communicate the following regarding the letter dated 21 August 2020 from the Permanent Representative of Turkey to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General ([A/74/997-S/2020/826](#)).

The agreement between Greece and Egypt signed on 6 August 2020 concerning the delimitation of their exclusive economic zones is the outcome of good-faith negotiations and cooperation between two neighbouring countries with opposite coasts, aiming to settle maritime delimitation issues peacefully and on the basis of international law, including the relevant provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, to which both States are parties. This agreement, just as the one with Italy earlier on, is part of Greece's strategy to conclude delimitation agreements with all its neighbours, in full respect for the law of the sea.

It is to be noted that Turkey's unilateral withdrawal from the bilateral exploratory talks with Greece that it was agreed to restart in the framework of the Germany-facilitated dialogue, on the pretext of the conclusion of the above-mentioned agreement, is unreasonable and calls into question the sincerity of Turkey's intentions to carry out any dialogue with Greece. In this context, the deployment of Turkish research vessels and military units in an area that includes part of the Greek continental shelf not only was in stark violation of international law but also reveals Turkey's true objectives in the Eastern Mediterranean.

My country has repeatedly rejected Turkey's unsubstantiated and illegal claims in the region in its letters dated 19 February 2020 ([A/74/710-S/2020/129](#)), 19 March 2020 ([A/74/758](#)) and 20 April 2020 ([A/74/819](#)) and note verbale dated 2 September 2020 ([A/74/1006](#)). I would like once again to stress that, in the view of my Government, the memorandum of understanding between Turkey and Libya's Government of National Accord on maritime delimitation is null and void and has no legal effect on Greece's sovereign rights (see the letter dated 9 December 2019 annexed to the letter dated 14 February 2020 ([A/74/706](#))); it violates the rules of the law of the sea regarding maritime delimitation, as well as those regarding the rights of islands to generate maritime zones beyond their territorial sea.



Greece also rejects once again Turkey's misleading, arbitrary and erroneous reading of the international jurisprudence relating to maritime delimitation, as well as of the relevant principles and conclusions drawn by international courts and tribunals, aiming at refashioning the geography of the area. In this respect, I would like to recall my letter addressed to the Secretary-General dated 20 April 2020 (A/74/819) and the note verbale dated 2 September 2020 (A/74/1006).

As has been repeatedly stressed by my country in my previous letters, islands, irrespective of their size, generate maritime zones (continental shelf/exclusive economic zone) beyond their territorial sea, as any land territory. This was confirmed in practice by the maritime delimitation agreements concluded by Greece with Italy and Egypt. Furthermore, Greece has, in accordance with international law, ipso facto and ab initio exclusive sovereign rights over its continental shelf, including that of its islands. In this respect, Greece has repeatedly informed the United Nations that, in the absence of maritime delimitation agreements, the outer limits of the Greek continental shelf and the exclusive economic zone (once declared) are the median line every point of which is equidistant from the nearest points on the baselines (both continental and insular) from which the breadth of the territorial sea is measured.

In the light of the above, Greece has protested, bilaterally and through its letter dated 11 August 2020 to the Secretary-General (A/74/988-S/2020/795), against the unauthorized Turkish navigational warnings by which Turkey decided to carry out illegal hydrocarbon exploration activities in part of the Greek continental shelf, as well as against any such subsequent unlawful activities.

Greece, fully respecting the principles of the United Nations and of international law, stands ready to resume the exploratory talks with Turkey from the point at which they were interrupted in March 2016. These talks, as is well known, concern the delimitation of the continental shelf and exclusive economic zone in the Aegean and the Eastern Mediterranean and should be carried out in accordance with international law and not under conditions of military pressure and threats. Such a course of action requires, however, that Turkey abandon its above-mentioned illegal activities and abstain from actions undermining international legality, peace and stability.

I would be grateful if you could have the present letter circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 76 (a), and of the Security Council and have it published on the website of the Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea, as well as in the next edition of the *Law of the Sea Bulletin*.

(Signed) Maria Theofili  
Ambassador  
Permanent Representative