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

Letter dated 11 August 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 draw your attention to the significant escalation of tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean caused by Turkish actions, which seriously endanger peace and security in the region, as well as blatantly violate Greece's sovereign rights.

More precisely, Turkey has, since 9 August, deployed its fleet in the Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean. Furthermore, since yesterday morning (10 August), after issuing an unauthorized NAVTEX message (1024/20), Turkey has dispatched the *Oruc Reis* research/survey vessel for seismic activities to an area falling within the Greek continental shelf, in blatant violation of the law of the sea. Greece could not but deploy its own fleet in the region to protect its sovereign rights.

Turkey's pretext for undertaking this illegal and aggressive act was the conclusion of an agreement between Greece and Egypt, on 6 August, which provides for a partial delimitation of their exclusive economic zones in a specific region, leaving space for further negotiations in the future with potentially interested neighbouring countries. The said agreement was concluded in good faith and in accordance with the provisions of international law, including the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

Furthermore, Turkey has used the said agreement between Greece and Egypt as a pretext for unilaterally withdrawing from the bilateral exploratory talks on the delimitation of the continental shelf between the two countries in the Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean, which were scheduled to take place later this month.

The above-mentioned action was the latest in a series of illegal and provocative actions undertaken by Turkey over recent months, including the almost daily violations of Greek airspace and territorial waters, the signing of the Turkish-Libyan Memorandum of Understanding, the unprecedented instrumentalization of "migrants" to instigate their crossing of European borders, the attempt to usurp sovereign rights of coastal States by pretending that islands are not entitled to an exclusive economic zone and continental shelf, the issuing of unauthorized NAVTEX warnings as well as proceeding to exploration activities in other countries' continental shelves.



I would like to emphasize that the recent dispatch of a Turkish research/survey vessel with the aim to conduct seismic activities in an area falling within the Greek continental shelf constitutes in itself a clear violation of Greece's sovereign rights over its continental shelf as enshrined in article 77 of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, which reflects customary international law. It also constitutes a blatant violation of article 121 (2) of the Convention, according to which islands generate maritime zones (continental shelf/exclusive economic zone) beyond their territorial sea as any other land territory.

Since Greece has ab initio and ipso facto sovereign rights over its continental shelf, including the exploration and exploitation of its natural resources, the above activities by Turkey neither bear any legal consequences on Greece's sovereign rights nor prejudice these rights in any way.

In this respect, I recall our verbal note dated 8 May 2012 with which national legislation defining the outer limits of the Greek continental shelf was registered with the United Nations (see *Law of the Sea Bulletin*, vol. 79, p. 14).

Allow me to conclude by stressing that Turkey's actions are in striking contrast to the efforts of Greece and other neighbouring countries to preserve stability in the region. Furthermore, Greece remains committed to its efforts to contribute to regional peace and security, while at the same time safeguarding its sovereign rights.

I would be grateful if you could have the present letter circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 74 (a), and of the Security Council and have it published in the next *Law of the Sea Bulletin*.

(Signed) Maria **Theofili**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative