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Politics

Egypt-Greece Eastern Mediterranean deal 'null and void,' Ankara says

As tensions have flared up since the discovery of significant oil and gas reserves in the Eastern Mediterranean, Cairo and Athens have signed a maritime agreement. Ankara says the deal violates Turkey's, Turkish Cypriots' and Libya's rights

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ERDOĞAN said the deal "has no value" and reminded that Turkey paused its hydrocarbon exploration efforts upon German Chancellor Angela Merkel's request for a solution, but drilling has resumed immediately as Athens and Cairo went back on their word. "There's no need for discussion with those who have no rights, especially in maritime zones," he added.

Turkey pointed out that the deal usurped and ignored the rights and continental shelves of both Ankara and Tripoli. Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu late Thursday indicated that the text and map of the agreement had yet to be revealed, adding: "However, it's obvious by the given coordinates that the deal not only violates the rights and continental shelf of Turkey but also of Libya."

"Hence, an agreement that violates our continental shelf, which we have reported to the U.N., is null and void and the reason why we've come to this point is that countries like Greece and the Greek Cypriot administration, are trying to sign agreements with Egypt and Israel while ignoring Turkey," Çavuşoğlu told Anadolu Agency (AA).

"We'll continue to show them and the world that this agreement is null and void on the table and in the field," the minister stated.

Turkey's statements were followed by the official Libyan government which similarly condemned the Greek-Egyptian deal.

"Libya will not allow violations of its maritime rights," foreign ministry spokesman Mohammed al-Qablawi said on Twitter. Al-Qablawi reiterated Libya's commitment to a memorandum of understanding concerning the delimitation of maritime jurisdiction signed with Turkey. Libya urges states bordering the Mediterranean to act in accord with



The Turkish drilling vessel Yavuz is escorted by Turkish navy frigate TCG Gemlik (F-492) in the Eastern Mediterranean off the island of Cyprus, Aug. 6, 2019.

the principles of international law, al-Qablawi also stressed. The Turkish Foreign Ministry in a written statement on the same day elaborated that there is no mutual sea border between Egypt and Greece. It reminded that Egypt, which surrendered an area of 11,500 square kilometers (4,440 square miles) with the so-called agreement it signed with the Greek Cypriot administration in 2003, has once again acted at the expense of and against the interests of the Egyptian people with this move.

Ankara also said that Turkey will not allow such activities in the area and reiterated the country's determination to protect both Turkey's and Turkish Cypriots' legitimate rights and interests in the Eastern Mediterranean.

ANKARA SEEKS FOR DIALOGUE

"The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea is clear," Mesut Hakki Çasın, a law professor at Istanbul's Yeditepe University, told Daily Sabah, adding that Turkey notified the U.N. about its deal with Libya, which was agreed upon by the governments of both countries. He added that according to the U.N., countries had to apply to mutual negotiations to solve maritime claims.

Çasın further underlined that Turkey did not take a step back from NAVTEX and sim-

ply paused its drilling activities for the sake of enhancing its relations with the European Union and opening the door for constructive dialogue with Greece. "Yet, Greece is the one sabotaging relations," he said, underlining that Turkey also has the support of regional countries and even a circle within Egypt that is backing the Turkey-Libya deal.

"I believe that Egypt's decision was merely political," the law expert pointed out, saying that Cairo entered a disadvantageous deal with Greece.

"Meis and Rhodes islands do not have the right of exclusive economic zones," Çasın elaborated. He referred to Kastellorizo (Meis), one of the smallest Greek islands in the Aegean Sea and only 2 kilometers away from the Turkish coast.

Saying that Egypt lost a substantial portion of its maritime zone by making a deal with Greece instead of Turkey, former ambassador Oguz Çelikok stated: "The greatest reaction to the Egyptian government will come from the Egyptian people themselves. The (Abdel-Fattah) el-Sissi regime seems to have given up on a large maritime zone through the agreement with Greece."

Greece has to discuss the issue with Turkey, Çelikok told the Demirens News Agen-

cy (DHA), underlining that otherwise, problems in the region will continue.

GREECE CLAIMS DEAL IS LEGITIMATE

Speaking at a joint press conference in the capital Cairo with his Greek counterpart Nikos Dendias, Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry said the deal "opens new horizons for economic cooperation with Greece."

Dendias, for his part, said the maritime agreement with Cairo was "legitimate" and "reflects the dimensions of cooperation between the two countries in combating threats in the region."

"Following the signing of today's agreement, the null and void Turkey-Libya agreement has ended up where it belonged from the very first moment: in the rubbish bin," Dendias said, adding that he called on every country in the region "to follow the example of this agreement we signed today and the corresponding agreement that we signed a few months ago with Italy."

Greece accordingly dared to state Thursday that the deal on exclusive economic zones (EEZ) in the Eastern Mediterranean is "in accordance with international law." Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis said the deal is "a legitimate agreement that fully satisfies

both countries."

Since the discovery of significant gas reserves in the region a decade ago, countries have been engaged in renewed disputes over maritime borders while international law also presents few remedies. The deepening rift between the two countries has surfaced with Turkey's decision to enhance energy exploration activities in the Eastern Mediterranean and the deal Ankara made with Libya's official government.

Egypt and Greece had been in talks for a while after Turkey and Libya on Nov. 27, 2019, signed two separate pacts - one on military cooperation and the other on maritime boundaries of countries in the Eastern Mediterranean.

The agreement between Turkey and Libya determined the sovereignty area based on international law as 186,000 square kilometers. Thus, the possibility of making an EEZ agreement between Greece and Egypt, and Greece and Greek Cypriots, was eliminated.

The maritime pact asserted Turkey's rights in the Eastern Mediterranean in the face of unilateral drilling by the Greek Cypriot administration, clarifying that the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) also had rights to the resources in the area. The pact took effect on Dec. 8.

Within this scope, Ankara has sent drilling vessels to the Eastern Mediterranean since last year, a move opposed by Athens and the Greek Cypriot administration which have threatened to arrest the ships' crews and enlist European Union leaders to join their criticism.

Ankara has on every occasion vowed it wants to see energy as an incentive for political resolution on the island and peace in the wider Mediterranean basin, not a catalyst for further tensions. Yet, Egypt and Greece condemned the deal as "illegal" and a violation of international law. Tensions were already high between Greece and Turkey because of Turkish gas exploration in the Eastern Mediterranean off the coast of the island of Cyprus. The NATO members are also at odds over mineral rights, territorial waters, islands and airspace in the Aegean Sea. Turkey has the longest shoreline in the Eastern Mediterranean, making it a natural candidate for seeking reserves in the region in accordance with international law. The presence of the Turkish Cypriot government in Northern Cyprus also strengthens Turkey's hands as the country defends the rights of the Turkish Cypriots in the region and insists that their consent is needed for any type of drilling activities.

ANKARA / DAILY SABAH

US renews call for political solution in Libya, imposes sanctions on smugglers

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THE TALKS came as Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu of Turkey, the crucial backer of Libya's U.N.-recognized legitimate government, visited Tripoli.

Çavuşoğlu said a cease-fire should see the Government of National Accord (GNA) exerting control of areas held by Haftar, who has suffered losses but still controls eastern Libya.

Amid the instability, the U.S. imposed sanctions on a Libyan national, Faysal al-Wadi, two of his associates and the Malta-based company Alwafaq Ltd. on

allegations of smuggling. The Treasury Department said al-Wadi and his Maraya vessel have been smuggling fuel and drugs from Libya to Malta, the gateway to the European Union, and transporting Libyan fuel and drugs between Libya's port of Zuwarah and Hurd's Bank just outside Malta's territorial waters.

The department noted that Hurd's Bank is a well-known geographic transfer location for illicit maritime transactions.

"The United States is committed to exposing illicit networks exploiting Libya's resources for their own profit while hurting the Libyan people," Deputy Treasury

Secretary Justin Muzinich said in a statement.

"Competition for control of smuggling routes, oil facilities, and transport nodes is a key driver of conflict in Libya and deprives the Libyan people of economic resources," the department added.

The order freezes any assets in the U.S. and opens the way for criminal prosecution over transactions with the individuals, company or ship.

Libya's National Oil Corporation (NOC) said later that it welcomes the U.S. decision to impose sanctions on three individuals and a company that are

claimed to smuggle fuel and drugs from Libya to Malta, according to a statement released Thursday.

The NOC said the network of smugglers "have contributed significantly to destabilizing the country," adding it will continue to monitor all smuggling operations in various regions of Libya.

"(We) will continue to submit reports to the Office of the Attorney General and the Sanctions Committee of the Security Council and follow up legal procedures to hold accountable those involved in these illegal act," said the statement released on the NOC's Facebook page.

Libya has been in chaos since a Western-backed uprising toppled dictator Moammar Gadhafi in 2011.

Haftar's violent bid to seize Tripoli has been backed by U.S. allies Saudi Arabia, Egypt and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) as well as Russian mercenaries.

The White House on Tuesday called for a solution that includes a withdrawal of all foreign military personnel.

The U.S. recognizes the Tripoli government but President Donald Trump caused confusion last year by praising Haftar.

ISTANBUL / DAILY SABAH WITH AGENCIES



A migrant wearing a face mask to prevent the spread of the coronavirus waves before boarding an airplane bound for Iraq at the Eleftherios Venizelos International Airport in Athens, Greece, Aug. 6, 2020.

DESIGNER: BÜŞRA ÖZTÜRK

Athens begins voluntary repatriation of migrants

GREECE on Thursday began sending migrants back to their countries of origin based on its voluntary repatriation program.

With 134 Iraqi passengers taking off from Athens on an Iraq-bound flight Thursday, the first leg of the program designed to return migrants and refugees to their home countries has been launched.

Funded by the European Union, the program aims to lighten the burden of the countries within the bloc that struggle with large numbers of migrants and refugees.

The program suggests that if a migrant or refugee who is one of the 5,000 people who came to the Greek islands before Jan. 1, 2020, chooses to return to his or her home country, the EU will provide 2,000 euros (\$2,363) of financial support.

Initially scheduled to be launched in March, the program had to be delayed due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Greece has been frequently criticized for its questionable practices and policies

toward migrants and the inhumane conditions of its overcrowded camps.

Athens has lately decided to deploy a floating barrier to stop migrants arriving from the Turkish coast off the island of Lesbos.

The area northeast of Lesbos has been chosen for the project, along a waterway used by hundreds of thousands of migrants attempting to enter the country from neighboring Turkey in recent years.

Rights groups have criticized the plan as potentially life-threatening to migrants in overcrowding dinghies who often require rapid rescue. A wire fence on Greece's land border with Turkey is also currently being expanded.

The country also conducts another program with the EU, designed for unaccompanied minors from migrant camps in Greece to be relocated to several other European states.

On Tuesday, 18 unaccompanied minors from Greek camps have been relocated to

Belgium as part of the program.

The Belgian government announced in May to take in the children, who had been in the camps for several months without a parent or guardian.

Ten other EU member states, Bulgaria, France, Croatia, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Portugal, Luxembourg, Lithuania and Slovenia, are participating in the program and have committed to welcoming up to 2,000 unaccompanied children and adolescents.

Norway has also expressed a willingness to join, according to the Commission.

More than 200 have already arrived since April in Luxembourg, Germany, Portugal and Finland.

Germany also pledged to take care of 243 seriously ill or particularly vulnerable children and members of their immediate family, more than 920 people in total.

The program also suggests that Portugal will take in 500 unaccompanied minors and France 350.

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