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THE AEGEAN PROBLEM IN RELATIONS BETWEEN TURKEY AND GREECE

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ABSTRACT

Throughout history, there have been enmity, confrontation, conflicts, controversial issues, as well as friendly relations between Greece and Turkey.

There were several wars and conflicts between the two countries in the 20th century. However, since 1999, Turkish-Greek relations have entered a new era based on cooperation and dialogue in various fields. At the same time, official relations between Greece and Turkey improved as a result of the Greek government's support for Turkey's EU membership efforts, but some problems were not resolved.

One of these disputes is related to the delimitation of territorial sea in the Aegean Sea. The problem in the Aegean Sea arises from disputes over the continental shelf and territorial waters. It should be noted that the resolution of this dispute is of keen interest not only to Greece and Turkey, but also to European countries, Russia and Israel. The discovery of new oil and gas deposits in the Eastern Mediterranean further complicates the problem. If the dispute is resolved in favor of Turkey, then these fields will belong to the territorial waters of Southern Cyprus if it is resolved in favor of Turkey and Greece. This is a factor that directly affects Europe's energy dependence on Russia. Therefore, when proposing a solution to a problem, it becomes necessary to conduct both legal and political analysis.

The purpose of the research is to study the period between Turkey and Greece from the end of the 20th century to the beginning of the 21st century, the development of bilateral and multilateral political relations, trade, economic, transport, tourism, cultural and educational relations, as well as a detailed examination of the problems existing between the two countries. One of the important factors determining the relevance of the study is the comprehensive development of

relations between the two countries and the study of existing problems between them.

In general, there is progress between Turkey and Greece in diplomatic, political, trade, economic, transport, tourism, cultural and educational relations. To resolve existing problems between the two countries through dialogue, various mechanisms have been established, such as political discussions, meetings and the High-Level Cooperation Council, and the number of high-level official visits has increased recently. High-level Cooperation Council meetings are organized alternately in Turkey and Greece under the coordination of the heads of government and foreign ministers of both countries.

It can be concluded that the most beneficial option is to provide these islands with 3 nautical miles of territorial waters, as provided for in the Treaty of Lausanne of 1923 and the Treaty of Paris of 1947. Given the unchanged position of both countries, it is recommended to resolve the issue of delimitation of territorial waters in the Aegean Sea within the framework of the above principles and methods in order to prevent this crisis from becoming global.

Main part:

The Aegean problem is in fact not one problem, but a series of problems: they concern restrictions on territorial waters, sovereign rights over the continental shelf and airspace, the management of military and civilian air traffic control zones, and the militarization of the Greek islands.

Thus, the Greek side argues that the only subject of dispute between the parties is the delimitation of territorial waters. However, the Turkish side divides disputes related to the Aegean Sea into 5 different categories [7]:

1) Jurisdiction at sea – territorial waters, continental shelf and their delimitation;

2) the demilitarized status of the eastern Aegean islands on the basis of relevant international documents, including the Treaty of Lausanne of 1923 and the Treaty of Paris of 1947;

3) the legal status of certain geographical features in the Aegean Sea;

4) 10 nautical mile claims to Greek national airspace;

5) Search and rescue missions.

The most important of these issues for Turkey is the issue of territorial sea. Under the 1982 Maritime Convention, which Turkey is not a signatory, Greece has the right to extend its territorial sea to 12 miles, although Greece has so far refrained from exercising this right. Greece expanding its territorial waters from 6 miles to 12 miles could make it difficult for Turkey to enter major ports such as Istanbul and Izmir. Turkey has repeatedly stated that any attempt by Greece to expand its territorial waters to 12 miles would lead to a state of war. The threat of force if Greece exercises its right to expand its territorial waters has become a major source of tension between the two countries. Official circles in Greece are firmly convinced that there will be no rapprochement between Greece and Turkey, especially as long as Greece threatens to use force to resolve its political activities in accordance with international law [4, p. 130].

Turkey and Greece also clash in Aegean airspace. Turkey does not recognize the 12 miles of airspace claimed by Greece, asserting Greek sovereignty over just 6 miles. To emphasize this point, Turkey regularly sends its aircraft within 6 miles of the Greek coast. Greece responded by sending a plane to intercept the Turkish plane, regarding this as a violation of airspace. Official fighting and airspace issues are a constant source of concern for Turkey's NATO allies, who are concerned that an incident or miscalculation could lead to a major conflict between the two countries, as happened during the Imia/Kardak crisis in January and February 1996.

The Republic of Turkey has repeatedly proposed to initiate a bilateral dialogue with Greece to resolve these issues. However, Greece rejected broad bilateral dialogue, arguing that only one issue should be resolved – the continental shelf. Greece argues that the case should be referred to the International Court of

Justice in The Hague. Be that as it may, Turkey preferred to resolve the issue through bilateral negotiations and refused to submit this issue to the International Court of Justice [1, p. 137].

Another issue straining bilateral relations is Greece's militarization of the eastern Aegean and Dodecanese islands, which Turkey claims is contrary to the terms of the 1947 Paris Agreement. On the contrary, Greece argues that the militarization of the islands was a defensive response to Turkey's creation of a 100,000-strong «Fourth Aegean Army» shortly after the Turkish invasion of Cyprus in 1974, headquartered in Izmir, a few miles from the Greek islands. Until recently, Turkey refused to release its Aegean army. But in the spring of 2000, Admiral Güven Erkaya, former commander of the Turkish Navy and adviser to Prime Minister Acavit, proposed in a secret memorandum (later leaked to the Turkish press) to release Turkey's Aegean Army in exchange for a promise not to expand Greece's territorial waters to 12 miles. Although his proposal was initially rejected by the Turkish military, who stated that Greece should agree not to extend its territorial waters beyond 12 miles, it is seen in some Turkish circles as a favor that, combined with Greek reciprocity, could lead to an escalation of the Aegean dispute [1, p.139].

Since mid-1999, Turkey's relations with Greece have softened considerably. But the Aegean dispute continues to cloud relations and may even derail current muted tensions. For example, in October 2000, disagreements over access to the islands of Lemnos and Ikaria led Greece to withdraw from NATO exercises in the Aegean Sea to bring Greece and Turkey closer together. Although both sides tried to declare their commitment to easing relations, this incident made it clear that disagreements over the Aegean Sea continue to burden relations [2, p. 90].

In addition, the EU appears to have resolved Turkey's differences with Greece by demanding Turkey's accession to the EU. In December 1999, the official message of the EU summit in Helsinki called on candidate states to try to resolve border disputes and other related issues or, failing that, to refer the dispute to the International Court of Justice within a reasonable time. The Council stated that it would review the situation regarding the accession process by the end of 2004. Thus,

with no resolution to the dispute, Turkey's application for EU membership continued to be extended until today.

In January 2002, Greece agreed to begin a bilateral dialogue with Turkey on the Aegean Sea. Greek diplomats wanted the dialogue to be limited to the continental shelf. At the same time, other issues needed to be discussed during the dialogue, such as airspace control and disagreements regarding the Ecumenical Patriarch (the spiritual leader of the world's Orthodox Christians, who lives in Istanbul).

At first glance, the complex Aegean conflict seems zero-sum and difficult to resolve as it involves sensitive "national issues" such as sovereignty, sovereign rights, oil reserves, freedom of the high seas and air, access to ports, security and influence. However, unlike the Cyprus problem, the motto "no solution can be solved" does not apply to the Aegean conflict. As can be seen from the two settlement attempts (1975-1981 and 2002-2003), both sides came to a strong agreement on the basic principles and parameters of a proper and fair settlement, as well as the latest negotiations, which seem promising since May 2010 [2, p. 73].

At the Aegean level, it must be clearly demonstrated that Greece does not want to "strangle Turkey" by turning the Aegean into a "Greek sea"; Türkiye, for its part, is not thinking about "occupying the Greek islands". Resolving the Aegean conflict still requires more time than dialogue carried out in the spirit of *détente* – the easing of tensions in the Aegean Sea for more than a decade.

Critics of this approach note that attempts in 1975-1981 and 2002-2003 did not produce any results, and negotiations continued in 2004-2009 also led to failure: one or both sides failed to take important steps for various reasons. As for the more recent renewed negotiations (from 2010), Recep Tayyip Erdogan seemed ready to make a deal, but Greece, under the leadership of George Papandreou, who initially seemed more positive in this direction, agreed to extend the deal for a longer period due to concerns about internal costs. Moreover, given that Turkey's prospects in the EU are diminishing, EU membership is becoming less popular even within Turkey. Due to Turkey's growing influence vis-à-vis the EU

and the perception of Turkey as a constructive and friendly state in the region, there is little incentive to consider resolving the Aegean conflict as a priority.

But over time, the Greek side seems hopeless in solving the problem due to the country's economic problems. (Greece has been constantly on the verge of bankruptcy since 2009). Such a grim situation is unlikely to be conducive to a bold reconciliation at the Aegean level since, given Greece's current weakness and international influence, it will almost certainly be structured as a bribery of the opposition and the public.

The economic problems provoked another negative reaction from Greek nationalists and like-minded "experts": Greece should acquire the entire Aegean Sea (the traditional Andreas Papandreou line of the 1970s and 1980s) and possibly the eastern Mediterranean (around the small island of Kastellorizo), which would likely provide oil and other mineral resources and thus save Greece from bankruptcy. In this context, in addition to the other "six concepts" in the Aegean Sea, another promising dispute arises – about the exclusive economic zone [3, p. 124].

Despite the centuries-long conflict between Greece and Turkey, the Aegean Sea dispute is still a fairly new conflict that requires resolution for many reasons. Despite the possibility of an armed conflict, now is the time to begin a serious process of its resolution. The earthquakes that occurred in 1999 brought not only the population closer together, but also politicians and the media. However, in the 2000s, relations between Greece and Turkey repeatedly reached the point of armed conflict.

For example, President Erdogan's visit to Athens in 2017 took place in a very tense format. Both sides have laid a long list of historical claims against each other stemming from the collapse of the Ottoman Empire more than a century ago. Finally, Erdogan mentioned the Treaty of Lausanne of 1923, which formalized the end of the *de facto* war between the two countries and the final fall of the Ottoman Empire. This agreement largely determines the relationship between both countries. Erdogan said that many years after the agreement was signed between the countries, "new problems have arisen". As an example, he cited the situation of the Muslim

minority in Greece. The countries have long disagreed on a variety of issues, including where their continental shelf begins and ends, energy resources, how to fly over the Aegean Sea and more.

Cold relations between Athens and Ankara have begun to soften amid the devastating earthquake that Turkey faced in February 2023. After this, Greece immediately sent aid to the neighboring country. Two rescue teams arrived in Turkey to search for people under the rubble. Greek Foreign Minister Nikos Dendias has instructed the country's permanent mission to the UN in Geneva to take measures to provide urgent humanitarian assistance to Turkey and Syria through the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. Deputy head of the department Andreas Katsaniotis, in turn, took on the responsibility of coordinating the activities of organizations and individuals wishing to help collect humanitarian aid for the affected regions of Turkey and Syria.

After the earthquake, Mitsotakis called Erdogan and promised to help in eliminating the consequences of the earthquake. It was the first phone call in months. Relations with Greece really warmed up after providing assistance to Turkey after the earthquake. However, it should be noted that a number of factors influence the warming of relations. This is due to changes in the internal economic and internal political situation in Greece and Turkey, changes in the foreign policy situation around Turkey, relations between Turkey and the EU, a fundamental change in the situation in the Middle East and the situation in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Elections took place in Greece, which strengthened the position of the ruling majority and leader and gave it room to maneuver. In addition, Greece now feels more confident. He signed military agreements with France and the United States. At the same time, it is extremely important to take into account the results of the Turkish elections in Greek foreign policy. Of course, although the economic relations between Ankara and Athens are not so good, they are important for Greece. The possibility of doubling trade turnover has a positive effect on Greek foreign policy.

The benefits of establishing relations with

its neighbor for Turkey are obvious and they are quite multifaceted. Erdogan, who has consistently demonstrated an independent foreign policy, demonstrates through his actions his commitment to the obligations of the NATO alliance. Turkey has its own position in everything and balances its actions in other areas through dialogue with Greece. A clear proof of the warming relations between the two countries was the visit of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan to the Greek capital in early December 2023.

During the visit, 16 documents were signed between Athens and Ankara: declarations, agreements and memorandums, including the "Declaration of Friendship and Friendly Good Neighborhood Relations". The signed documents cover various areas of interaction between the two countries, including education, economics, social services, sports, tourism, research and innovation.

Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis announced in a joint press statement with Erdogan that Athens will issue visas to Turkish citizens for year-round weekly visits to 10 Greek islands in the Aegean Sea. Mitsotakis noted that this initiative "carries a strong message, but also expresses the great truth that the Greek islands are a bridge of communication and friendship between the two countries". According to him, the next step in restoring bilateral dialogue could be an approach to delimiting the continental shelf and exclusive economic zones in the Aegean and East Mediterranean seas.

The President of Turkey specially emphasized: "We want to turn the Aegean Sea into a sea of peace. We want to be an example for the whole world with the joint steps of Turkey and Greece". According to him, there are "no insoluble problems" between the countries [5]. On the eve of his meeting with the Greek Prime Minister, Erdogan gave an interview to the Kathimerini newspaper, called him a "friend" and called for a "new page" to be opened in relations between the two countries after many years of tension. "I think Mr. Mitsotakis understands and sees that we want to overcome the problems between Greece and Turkey and further develop our relations. I feel a similar position in him and it makes me happy...".

He said that Turkey has never viewed

neighboring Greece as an enemy or an enemy and that it has no problems with its neighbors that it cannot overcome. "We have the same geography, the same sea. We breathe the same air. We are connected by our past. There are many problems between us that we have not yet been able to solve and which we are aware of as two countries. Let's build trust between our countries. Let's expand our cooperation in the areas of economy, trade, transport, energy, healthcare, technology, education and youth policy. Let us mutually protect the historical and cultural heritage of our peoples" [6].

Consolutions

Thus, on the basis of international agreements, the legal position of both states and the approach of the International Court of Justice in similar cases, as well as consideration of the methods and principles applied, it can be concluded that the Aegean Sea should be divided between Turkey and Greece based on the center line principle applied by the International Court of Justice.

It is clear that this decision – the resolution will decide what activities each country allows and where, minimizing the possibility of military action between Greece and Turkey in the Aegean Sea. Moreover, the resolution will bring greater political, military and social stability and security to the region and ultimately to NATO and the EU. Both countries will gain more political respect and influence than they currently have and will increase their national prestige. Both Greece and Turkey will benefit from increased economic opportunities, from resources on the continental shelf to increased tourist numbers and business partnerships. The resolution will ensure uncontested passage for ships of all countries from the Aegean Sea to the Black Sea and back.

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NATO can improve the efficiency and effectiveness of crisis management planning and related measures and begin to view the Aegean as a strong point in the overall security and stability architecture, rather than as weak spots in Greece or Turkey that each country must defend. Both countries, on the other hand, could reduce the excessive amount of money they currently spend on national defense compared to other European countries due to the "threat". The resolution will give greater legitimacy to UN Declaration III and enable it to be accepted worldwide as the only true maritime regime. Finally, the Greeks and Turks (and America, which actually places great strategic importance on the region and spends a lot of time and money trying to prevent violence and resolve disputes) will be able to live easier knowing that the threat of war has been eliminated once and for all.

Undoubtedly, Turkey's EU membership proposal could help the settlement process. Moreover, Türkiye has wanted to become a member of the European Union for decades. Following his re-election in May amid an economic crisis, Erdogan said he intended to improve the country's relations with Western partners and allies.

It should be noted that Turkey has a long way to go before it is accepted as a full member of the EU, but this path of acceptance will have a cyclical connection with the Aegean dispute. The more Greece and Turkey try to resolve their disputes, the more likely it is that Turkey will fully comply with membership requirements and therefore be accepted into the EU. Likewise, if Turkey becomes a member of the EU, the European Union will help resolve the Aegean Sea dispute

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ЭГЕЙСКАЯ ПРОБЛЕМА В ОТНОШЕНИЯХ ТУРЦИИ И ГРЕЦИИ

РЕЗЮМЕ

Ключевые слова: Турция, Греция, Эгейское море, территориальные воды, делимитация.

Два прибрежных государства, Греция и Турция, имеют законные права и интересы в Эгейском море. К ним относятся безопасность, экономика и другие традиционные права, признанные международным правом. Есть два вопроса относительно Эгейского моря между Турцией и Грецией. Первое из них относится к территориальным водам, второе – к континентальному шельфу. Турецко-греческие разногласия по Эгейскому вопросу связаны с Эгейским статус-кво, который был установлен на основе Лозаннского договора 1923 года. Лозаннский договор был направлен на установление политического баланса между Грецией и Турцией. Türkiye приветствовала положения Лозаннского договора и ожидала, что Греция сделает то же самое. Ширина территориальных вод в Эгейском море для обеих стран составляет 6 миль. Однако Греция заявляет об увеличении своих территориальных вод с 6 до 12 миль. Греция неоднократно подчеркивала, что имеет права на территориальные воды и континентальный шельф в Эгейском море, что противоречит статье 300 Конвенции ООН по морскому праву, которая является одним из самых основных принципов международного права