

Research Report

General Assembly

1 | The situation of the Exclusive Economic Zones [EEZ] in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea

Table of Contents

Table of Contents	2
Introduction	3
Definition of Key Terms	4
Current State of Affairs	5
Major Countries and Organizations	6
Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue	7
Possible Solutions	8
Questions to Consider	9
Bibliography	10

Introduction

The General Assembly is perhaps one of the most vital organs of the United Nations; it is the only council in which every single member state has equal representation. As the name suggests, it functions to discuss a wide range of topics; the concept it tends to discuss the most, however, is peacekeeping in all its forms.

The First Committee, GA1, deals with disarmament and international security. This is very generalized, however, it covers some of the most important issues and situations we face today. The committee deals with global challenges and threats to peace that affect the international community. It seeks out solutions to challenges faced in regard to the international security regime. The committee conquers matters within the scope of the UN Charter and relating to the powers and functions of any other organ on the United Nations. Aspects such as governing disarmament, regulating armament, maintenance of international peace, promotion of cooperative arrangements, and measures directed towards strengthening stability through lower levels of armaments. The First Committee is a vital organ that contributes a great deal towards the United Nations.

An Exclusive Economic Zone, a concept established by the United Nations around the 1980s has proven to be very beneficial and crucial for coastal States. Within the EEZ, a state has sovereign rights for the *purpose of exploring, exploiting, conserving and managing natural resources, whether living and nonliving, of the seabed and subsoil and the superjacent waters and with regard to other activities for the economic exploitation and exploration of the zone, such as the production of energy from the water, currents and winds (UNCLOS)*.

In recent years, a dispute between the delimitation of EEZs in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea has escalated and needs to be addressed. As part of the GA 1, it is your responsibility, as delegates, to come up with efficient, reasonable solutions, tackling the conflict that is being faced in the Eastern Mediterranean. This situation mainly affects the Eastern Mediterranean countries, as well as the EU. It is vital that we address the problem and find a way to separate the zones and define borders.

Definition of Key Terms

Eastern Mediterranean Sea

The eastern Mediterranean Sea refers to the eastern approximate half (or even third) of the Mediterranean Sea. The Sea in Southeast Europe, northern Egypt and Western Asia embraces the coastal zones. The countries and territories of the **Eastern Mediterranean** include Cyprus, Greece, Palestine, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Turkey, Egypt, and Israel.

Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ)

According to the United Nations, an exclusive economic zone is a section of the sea near to the coastal region of a specific State. In this zone, the coastal State has 'sovereign rights' which are rights, duties and jurisdiction as specified in The UN Convention on the Law of the Sea.

The UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)

The UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, further referred to as UNCLOS, is an international treaty, adopted and signed in 1982. It replaced the four Geneva Conventions, previously dedicated towards regulations of the sea. The Convention has become the legal framework for marine and maritime activities, and specifies the term 'Exclusive Economic Zones' and legal issues relating to these.

Territorial Sea

The sovereignty of a coastal State extends, beyond its land and territory and internal waters. The breadth of this area is 12 nautical miles. The difference between territorial sea and the EEZ is that territorial sea is the area where a coastal state has full sovereignty over the waters, whereas the second is merely 'sovereign right', which refers to the state's rights below the surface of the sea.

Continental Shelf

The continental shelf is the area which exceeds the territorial sea, to a distance of 200 nautical miles from the baselines from the breadth of the territorial sea . In this area, the coastal state also holds sovereign rights i.e. for the purpose of exploring it and exploiting its natural resources.

Contiguous Zone

This is defined as the area of sea contiguous (i.e. connecting, bordering, adjacent) to and extending outside of the territorial sea. In this area, the country may exercise the necessary control to prevent and punish infringements of its customs, fiscal, immigration and sanitary laws within its territorial sea. This area cannot exceed 24 nautical miles from the territorial sea.

Delimitation

Delimitation refers to the act of *marking or describing the limits of something*. In this case, delimitation refers to defining the borders between EEZs.

Nautical Miles

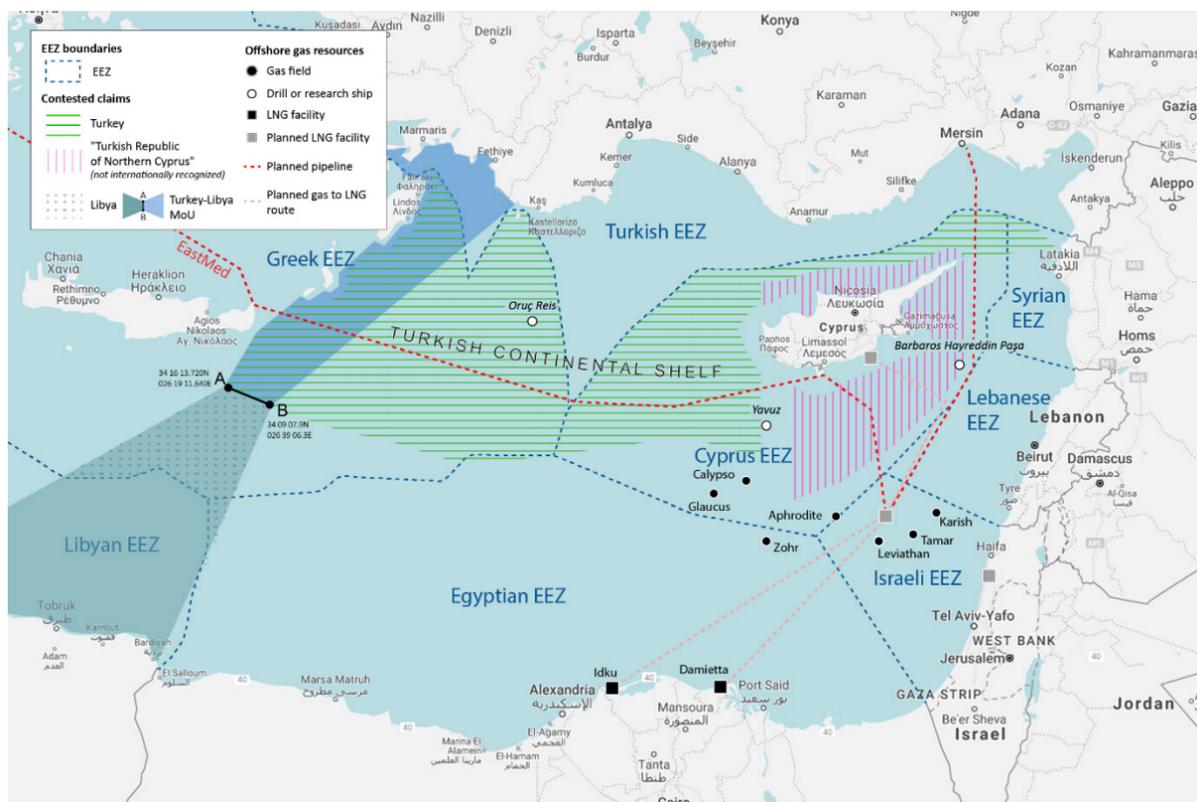
A unit of distance used at sea that is equal to 1,852 metres.

Current State of Affairs

Currently, the situation with the delimitation of EEZs in the Eastern Mediterranean has escalated, with the main parties involved being Turkey, who have a very strong and clear definition of EEZs. Turkey, in search of more sea area that they have sovereign rights over, are offensively following through on their views. Not believing that islands have a right to an EEZ, they have been invading the space of their neighbouring countries with illegal drilling and exploitations of resources as well as military invasions.

This behaviour is very clearly against the UNCLOS, the Convention written by the UN, specifically to prevent conflicts between countries. The Convention clearly defines the means to delineate EEZs and the rights of each coastal State. Seeing as the space in the Eastern Mediterranean is quite limited, a conflict was likely to arise. Currently, the region is divided as seen below in Figure 2. The MoU between Turkey and Libya puts a great divide between the Mediterranean. The countries have all claimed their EEZs, however Turkey claims to have more than what they actually do.

Figure 2 – Delimitation of the EEZs in the eastern Mediterranean and the Turkey-Libya MoU



Seeing as this matter is very focused on the Eastern Mediterranean itself, interventions by other member states such as the EU States as well as the US are unwelcome by Turkey. However, the EU considers applying further sanctions of Turkey. An extensive report is expected to be delivered by EU's top diplomat Josep Borrell at the March summit. Turkey implied they may be ready to comply with certain concessions and would like to avoid sanctions. With the coronavirus pandemic taking over a majority of countries time and resources, this dispute has de-escalated. In order to keep it that way, compromises should be accepted and collaboration is called for by all States involved.

Major Countries and Organizations

Turkey

Turkey is a party that plays a major role in this situation, being involved in several conflicts and having a strong opinion on the matter. The discovery of offshore natural gas reserves in the Eastern Mediterranean in the early 2000s, has led Turkey to challenge its neighbours with regard to international law and the delimitation of their EEZs. Turkey does not recognise Islands to obtain control of EEZs, starting conflicts with Islands such as Greece and Cyprus. The military interventions and illegal drilling by Turkey has destabilised the

whole region and amplified the conflict. Several violations such as intimidation and infringement upon territorial waters and airspaces of neighbouring countries have been carried out by Ankara.

A bilateral deal called the memorandum of understanding (MoU) between Turkey and the Libyan Government of National Accord (GNA) was formed in November 2019, which appears to determine new maritime boundaries. However, the boundaries draw a dividing line between the eastern and western parts of the Mediterranean, threatening maritime security, natural gas exploration and new infrastructures (including the EastMed pipeline). This MoU has brought a great deal of controversy to the situation, receiving shocked and disapproving reactions from neighbouring states, as well as the EU, condemning the actions. The president of Turkey, Erdogan, commented on their actions, saying “*With this new agreement between Turkey and Libya, we can hold joint exploration operations in these exclusive economic zones that we determined. There is no problem,*” The behaviour of Turkey reflects very ambitious ‘neo-Ottoman’ views, intent on spreading the country’s influence to neighbouring countries.

Greece

There is a long standing dispute, the Aegean dispute, between Turkey and Greece. The two countries have disagreed on the territorial waters and areas where each of them have sovereign rights. Additionally, several other claims have been made by Turkey regarding different Islands of Greece and their national conflicts– Greece sees these as a violation of sovereignty. As a response to the MoU between Turkey and Libya, Greece and Italy signed a bilateral agreement, on 9th June 2020, which delimitates their EEZs in the Ionian Sea. This expands Greece’s rights and access to resources in the eastern Mediterranean. This agreement, in line with the UNCLOS is highly important, especially from a strategic view– the agreement could be used to undermine the Turkey-Libya MoU.

Along with that, Greece and Egypt also signed a bilateral agreement (as of the 6th of August, 2020) on the delimitation of their respective maritime borders. Egypt’s Foreign Minister, Sameh Shoukry, said the *deal will allow Athens and Cairo to secure maximum benefits from oil and natural gas in the area.*

The European Union (EU)

When Greece, Italy and their other partners deemed the Turkey-Libya MoU illegal, they also called upon the EU for their assistance and support. Considering Turkey’s rather negative history in upholding human rights and the rule of law, the EU suspended accession

negotiations and all pre-accession funds under the planned financial framework for 2021 to 2027. After strongly condemning their illegal activities and military interventions, the EU reiterated the call on Turkey to respect the EEZs and the sovereign rights of all EU Member States, in accordance with the EU acquis and international law.

Cyprus

Similar to the conflict with Greece, Turkey claims that Cyprus— being an island— cannot have an EEZ of 200 nautical miles and should only be authorized to their territorial sea of 12 nautical miles. This definition creates a dispute as, technically, Cyprus should have access to a gas field, which Turkey wants to take away. Cyprus and several other states such as Israel, France and Russia have urged Turkey to refrain from exploiting the island's EEZ and deem their activities as illegal.

The Cypriot EEZ was delimited by bilateral agreements with Israel, Lebanon and Egypt. Cyprus has called on Turkey to define the boundaries between the two countries.

Libya

As mentioned above, Libya and Turkey signed a Memorandum of Understanding which delimitates their EEZs, which— according to the UN— infringes upon the sovereign rights of neighboring States and does not comply with the UNCLOS. In Libya, the signing was received differently. It was welcomed by the UN-recognised Government of National Accord (GNA), but rejected by the government backed by the Libyan House of Representatives. Seeing as Libya is currently experiencing the Second Libyan Civil War, opinions clash and it cannot be easily examined. However, the signing of the MoU has helped them gain the support from Turkey and certainly raised controversy.

United States of America

The US has not actively involved themselves, however, have *'been very consistent in calling to stop all provocative actions that could undermine investment confidence in the East Mediterranean region and affect political stability'*. The United States Senator and member of the Foreign Relations Committee, Bob Mendez called for sanctions to be imposed on Turkey due to its *'escalation in aggression in the eastern Mediterranean in a way that threatens US interests'*. Furthermore, they also authorised security assistance for Cyprus and Greece.

Possible Solutions

Essentially, there is not just one crisis to be solved, but multiple crises that have been building up over many years. It is a political dispute where many parties with varying policies and histories are involved. Therefore, a solution is not very simple, rather it is multifaceted and complex. Over time, the situation has been tackled several times and the main reason that a consensus could not be reached was due to the lack of communication. Therefore, the first, and main step that needs to be taken is an open approach, where the involved member states remain diplomatic and consider the options of compromises, concessions and reaching a common ground. This will not be simple, considering many previous attempts have been made, but it is certainly possible.

The main matter that has to be settled is the illegal drilling and exploration activities in the contested waters. All member states should be encouraged to halt these activities for some period of time, while the negotiations are to commence.

Diplomatic effort, mediation on de-escalating the crisis by the EU could be a further step. A set of international meetings and conferences could potentially serve as an effective means of de-escalation. These conferences should not solely comprise of the directly involved parties, but other parties that may be able to provide their support– countries bordering the eastern Mediterranean, Europe and NATO for example.

Furthermore, the eastern Mediterranean should be treated as a shared, common space. The strategic resources should be a means to more cooperation, rather than conflict, among eastern Mediterranean States. Therefore, it is crucial that there is a shift in the nature of conversation to a more cooperative mode, which will also reduce the tensions between the countries. This requires the acceptance that certain compromises have to be made and all parties should be prepared to accept these, if they want to peacefully coexist in this area. For example, giving Turkey access to the East Med Gas Forum (the pipeline to run across the region) could be considered in order to involve them further. In line with this, Turkey and Greece could certainly consider the possibility of joint ventures, treaties, and cooperative means for the exploration of undersea resources in the disputed maritime regions. An agreement on a joint framework could be very useful and can be reached through the steps mentioned above. It is important to focus on the opportunities that cooperation can open up– the parties involved could surely benefit from each other's support and good relationships.

Questions to Consider

1. Is your member state involved in any way in this issue? If yes, how have they acted and participated or addressed the problem?
2. What is your country's general policy on EEZs? Have they signed the UNCLOS, and if they are a coastal State, have they claimed an EEZ?
3. What preemptive measures can one take to prevent political conflicts like these?
4. What is the root cause of this problem, and how can one address this?
5. Are the actions of the involved parties mentioned justifiable? How can they be changed?
6. How can your country contribute towards solving the problem?
7. What are the short term and long term solutions for the conflict?
8. How can the member states involved work together to solve the problem at hand?

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