

Greece and Turkey's neorealist stance in the eastern Mediterranean Sea and Aegean Sea maritime disputes


La postura neorrealista de Grecia y Turquía en las disputas marítimas en el mar Mediterráneo oriental y el mar Egeo

Abstract: Maritime disputes between Greece and Turkey in the Aegean Sea and the eastern Mediterranean Sea reflect the conflicts in the history of formation of both States. These disagreements acquired new dimensions with the discovery of mineral resources on Cyprus' Continental Shelf, the organization of the East Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF) and the announcement of the creation of the *EastMed* pipeline, which has the participation of Greece, Cyprus and Israel; and the exclusion of Turkey from this project. In contrast, Turkey values the expansionist policy of the *Mavi Vatan* (Blue Homeland), which seeks a new geopolitical positioning. This article aims to analyze the maritime disputes between Greece and Turkey for the use of this pipeline, based on realism theory in international relations. In this context, we will analyze the extent to which the neorealist stance of both States interferes with their relations with the European Union (EU), with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), with the resolutions of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and with maritime disputes of the eastern Mediterranean Sea. To this end, we used a qualitative descriptive methodology through bibliographic research on the strategic relevance of the Aegean Sea and the eastern Mediterranean Sea and the challenges to maintain the stability of the region considering the particular interests of Greece and Turkey. In this sense, we used reports from the European Parliament, the US Congress on NATO, and articles on the maritime disputes in the region. The results show the extrapolation of the differences between the two States involving other actors in the maritime disputes, the establishment of international bilateral and multilateral agreements, the increased tension in the eastern Mediterranean Sea and, consequently, the adoption of a moderate stance by all actors involved in order to achieve a peaceful solution.

Keywords: Greece; Turkey; Cyprus; Aegean sea; eastern Mediterranean sea.

Resumen: Las disputas marítimas entre Grecia y Turquía en el mar Egeo y el mar Mediterráneo oriental reflejan los conflictos de la historia de formación de ambos Estados. Estos desacuerdos adquirieron nuevas dimensiones con el descubrimiento de recursos minerales en la Plataforma Continental de Chipre, con la organización del Foro de Gas Natural del Mediterráneo Oriental (EMGF) y el anuncio de la creación del oleoducto *EastMed*, que cuenta con la participación de Grecia, Chipre e Israel; y la exclusión de Turquía en este proyecto. En cambio, hay una apreciación, por parte de Turquía, de la política expansionista de *Mavi Vatan* (Patria Azul), que busca un nuevo posicionamiento geopolítico. Este artículo pretende analizar las disputas marítimas entre Grecia y Turquía para el uso de dicho oleoducto, a la luz de la teoría realista de las relaciones internacionales. En este contexto, se analizará hasta qué punto la postura neorrealista de ambos Estados interfiere en sus relaciones con la Unión Europea (UE), con la Organización del Tratado del Atlántico Norte (OTAN), con las resoluciones de la Convención de las Naciones Unidas sobre el Derecho del Mar (CNUDM) y en las disputas marítimas del mar Mediterráneo oriental. Para ello, se utilizó una metodología descriptiva cualitativa por medio de investigación bibliográfica sobre la relevancia estratégica del mar Egeo y del mar Mediterráneo oriental y los desafíos para mantener la estabilidad de la región frente a los intereses particulares de Grecia y de Turquía. En este sentido, se utilizaron informes del parlamento europeo, del congreso estadounidense sobre la OTAN y artículos sobre las disputas marítimas de la región. Los resultados fueron la extrapolación de las diferencias entre los dos Estados, involucrando a otros actores en las disputas marítimas, la realización de acuerdos bilaterales y multilaterales internacionales, el aumento de la tensión en el mar Mediterráneo oriental y, en consecuencia, la adopción de una postura moderada de todos los actores involucrados a fin de lograr una solución pacífica.

Palabras clave: Grecia; Turquía; Chipre; mar Egeo; mar Mediterráneo oriental.

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1 INTRODUCTION

The relations between States are anarchic. In general, neorealist theory seeks to explain these relations between States based on the structure and influence of the international system on them (LAMY, 2005). In this context, we selected the relations between Turkey and Greece in the maritime disputes in the eastern Mediterranean Sea and Aegean Sea.

It is important to note that the Aegean Sea and the eastern Mediterranean Sea are situated in a strategic position, since they materialize a geopolitical intersection between the west and the east, being natural confluences of maritime communication lines from Europe, Asia and Africa (AUTRAN, 2021).

The Aegean Sea plays an important role in the history of these two countries. It was the scene of disputes over rights to maritime spaces over time. In addition, the Aegean Sea has more than 2500 islands, which increases the complexity of negotiations from the legal perspectives of disputes.

In 1982, there was the creation of the *United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea* (UNCLOS), which sought to regulate, at an international level, the duties and rights regarding the maritime spaces of States. Although Greece is a signatory to the Convention, Turkey is not. This situation hinders negotiations in this forum and helps to demonstrate the anarchic character of the international system, as it justifies the States' pursuit of power.

Despite dissent between Turkey and Greece, both States are members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Participation in this common treaty has not prevented strife between the two States in recent history. There were even threats of use of force during the Invasion of Cyprus (1974), as presented below in this article.

In 2020, Greece and Turkey again found themselves on the brink of war because of opposition and exercise of sovereignty over the waters of the Aegean Sea and eastern Mediterranean Sea due to the then recent discovery of mineral resources. Nevertheless, once again, peace was kept.

Turkey and Greece have historical differences that are related to their respective formation processes. This article aims to explain, based on neorealist theory, how these relations occurred over time, especially since the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, and how they have recently been aggravated.

Accordingly, the objective of this research is to analyze the relation between Greece and Turkey concerning the relevance of the Aegean Sea and eastern Mediterranean Sea, as well as the challenges to maintain the stability of the region considering the particular interests of each of these States.

The relation of these States was analyzed from the perspective of Waltz's neorealism theory, whose central objective is to explain the main causes of war in international relations, advancing an analysis that enables both the understanding of international conflicts and the political construction of peace.

To this end, we used a qualitative descriptive methodology, with the help of bibliographic research, focused on reports from the European Parliament, from the US Congress on NATO, and on articles on the maritime disputes in the region. The results show the extrapolation of the differences between the two States involving other actors in the maritime disputes,

the establishment of international bilateral and multilateral agreements, the increased tension in the eastern Mediterranean Sea and, consequently, the adoption of a moderate stance by all actors involved in order to achieve a peaceful solution.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Kenneth Neal Waltz (1924–2013) is an American political scientist, who defended, in 1954, at Columbia University, his doctoral thesis on the theme *Man, the State and the International System in Theory of the Causes of War*¹. At that time, he introduced the development of the neorealist or structural realist theory of international relations, which resulted in the publication of the book *Man, the State and War: a theoretical analysis*,² in 1954, enhancing his theory, in 1979, through the book *Theory of International Politics*.³

Waltz's neorealist theory has as its central objective the explanation of the main causes of war in international relations, advancing an analysis that enables both the understanding of international conflicts and the political construction of peace. Thus, founded on the assumption that there is a dynamics of mutual constitution between the occurrence of wars and the formation of States, we seek to investigate the three images of the neorealist theory of international relations — man, States, and the State system — in order to analyze the causes of contemporary wars and how they influence the structuring of the State system, which is the foundation of the international system (WALTZ, 1959).

According to Waltz (1959), the understanding of war can be divided into three images⁴. The first concerns the philosophical discussion about human nature and man's influence on the occurrence of war. In the second image, the author focuses on the action of States, understood as the maximum structure of society, these being the main agents that produce war. In the third image, in turn, there is the affirmation of the existence of an anarchic international system, in which States interact with one another in search of a balance of power.

The third image is central to the understanding of war, and this image is influenced to a greater or lesser extent by the other images (WALTZ, 1974). In this sense, the contemporary international context – volatile, uncertain, dynamic and ambiguous – shows the same inclination to war pointed out by Waltz.

The late 20th century saw the rise of new actors on the international political scene, such as the United Nations (UN) and the European Union. However, the transnational aspect of the UN does not change the anarchic character of the international system, since the institution is composed of States that develop policies and apply them to other States. Similarly, the

1 Original title: *Man, the State and the State System in Theories of the Causes of War*.

2 Original title: *Man, The state and war: A Theroretical analysis*.

3 Original title: *Theory of international politics*.

4 The author points out that image cannot be confused with level. According to him, the term image of analysis suggests the way a figure appears to each one, pointing out that each one has a particular view of the world. From the moment it is found that international politics cannot be observed directly and truly, the term image refers to what is seen from different perspectives.

European Union seeks cooperation between member states, but faces new challenges, such as Turkey's request to enter and the United Kingdom's unilateral decision to exit.

Since the purpose of States is the practice of war, protection, extraction, application of justice and production, the structural logic of the preservation of States still to date follows the fine line between war and political action (MAIA; BARBOSA, 2013). According to Waltz (1974), States wage wars because nothing prevents them from waging wars. Although — in a historical retrospective — direct *casus belli* have varied, war remains an efficient coercive tool of States. In this regard, even when there is no conflict, States move their policies to prepare for the clash, given the need to preserve the sovereignty, nationalism and security that sustains them, maintaining the balance of power and their *status quo* in the international political arena.

3 HISTORY OF THE RELATIONS BETWEEN GREECE AND TURKEY

Turkey and Greece are two States located southeast of Europe and separated by the eastern Mediterranean Sea and the Aegean Sea as represented by Figure 1 (CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY, 2021). Turkey has a land area of 783,500 km² and a population of 82 million people, while Greece has an area of 132,000 km² and a population of 10.6 million.

Figure 1 – Aegean Sea and Eastern Mediterranean Sea



Source: SEQUEIRA, 2016

The two countries, neighboring each other geographically, have relations marked by alternating periods of hostility and peace. In effect, after the Greek War of Independence (1821-1832) against the former Ottoman Empire, four major conflicts between Turks and Greeks can be noted:

the Greco-Turkish War of 1897, the First Balkan War (1912-1913), the persecutions during World War I (1914-1918), and the Greco-Turkish War (1919-1922) (GRECO-TURKISH..., 1998).

The first conflict, the Greco-Turkish War or Thirty-Day War (1897), occurred in a context of increasing Greek concern over the conditions of its inhabitants on the Turkish-ruled island of Crete, where relations between Christians and Muslim rulers progressively deteriorated (WAR of GREEK..., 1988).

The First Balkan War, in turn, lasted from October 1912 to May 1913, involving actions of the Balkan League – the former kingdoms of Bulgaria, Serbia, Greece and Montenegro – against the Ottoman Empire. The war resulted from the aspirations of nationalist States that wished to incorporate territories whose majority of the population claimed to belong to some of those nationalities, which, however, remained under the rule of the Ottoman Empire (HALL, 2014; WAR OF GREEK..., 1988).

In turn, during World War I, there was systematic persecution of the Christian Greek population of Anatolia, instigated by the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish nationalist movement for religious and ethnic reasons. Hundreds of thousands of Ottoman Greeks died in this period and the surviving refugees, upon returning to Greece, caused an increase of approximately a quarter to the population of that country (BLAINEY, 2009).

Current maritime disputes stem largely from the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, which ended the Greco-Turkish War of the early 1920s. The treaty established the independence of the Turkish territories and balanced the interests of the two countries in the Aegean Sea, delimiting maritime areas, demilitarizing Greek islands and advocating mutual benefits for Greece and Turkey. Thus, there was a stabilization of relations in the following decades, which remained until the recent maritime discussions returned.

Subsequently, the 1947 Treaty of Paris between Italy and the Allied Powers, including Greece, reverted possession of the Dodecanese islands in the Aegean Sea, to Greece, as compensation for losses in World War II (1939-1945), while maintaining a limitation to the militarization of the islands. These islands had already been Turkish in the 16th century, but came into possession of Italy after the Italian-Turkish War of 1912. Hence, the Treaty of Lausanne, which had confirmed Italian ownership of these islands, would have been, in a way, replaced by the provisions of the Treaty of Paris. As a result, the islands on the southwest coast of Turkey came to be seen as a strategic problem for the Turks, compromising, with the Treaty of Paris, the balance provided by the Treaty of Lausanne (MANN, 2001).

4 THE IMPORTANCE OF GREEK AND TURKISH PARTICIPATION IN NATO AND THE EU

NATO, led by the United States of America (USA), was initially created as a collective defense alliance to oppose, during the Cold War⁵, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

5 The Cold War arose in the context of a bipolar international order characterized by confrontation between the US and Russia (former USSR) in a pursuit of spheres of influence. In this case, considering the period between the presentation of the Truman Doctrine to the US Congress in 1947, with the foreign policy directives of containment of Soviet expansionism, and the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, which preceded the dissolution of the former USSR in 1991.

(USSR), whose largest representative was Russia. Although geographically closer to the USSR, both Turkey and Greece joined NATO in 1952. Therefore, until the end of the Cold War, the participation of both countries in the alliance contributed so diplomatic deadlocks were resolved within the scope of political association against a common enemy. After the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact, the main threat to NATO, the organization became, in addition to a military alliance, a treaty to represent the attempt to guarantee the collective security of Europe (MANN, 2001).

Turkey is important for NATO, as the country helps to contain Spykman's *Rimland* in Eurasia, directly confronting Russia (KAPLAN, 2013)⁶. This perspective is pointed out by American experts on issues related to Turkey, according to the excerpt:

Turkey's location near various global access points has made the continued availability of its territory — for **parking and transportation of weapons, cargo and personnel — valuable to the United States and NATO**. From Turkey's perspective, NATO's traditional value has been to mitigate its concerns about invading neighbors. Turkey initially turned to the West largely as a reaction to the post-World War II aggressive stance of the Soviet Union. In addition to Incirlik Air Base near the city of Adana in southern Turkey, there are other important US/NATO sites, with an early missile alarm in eastern Turkey and a NATO ground forces command in Izmir. Turkey also controls access to and from the Black Sea through its straits⁷. (ZANOTTI; THOMAS, 2021, p. 3, our translation, emphasis added)

However, according to Kaplan (2013), it is an ally that is not totally faithful to the treaty. In March 2003, the Turkish parliament voted against the deployment of troops of the United States — the largest power in NATO — on its territory for the invasion of Iraq, showing some resistance to US interests.

In addition, in 2017, Turkey began the process of acquiring a Russian surface-to-air defense system, designated S-400, and the possible purchase of Russian fighter aircraft, in a rapprochement between the countries. According to Zanotti and Thomas (2021), this situation required a firm stance of the US, which announced the non-supply of the F-35 *Joint Strike Fighter* aircraft to Turkey and, additionally, stopped manufacturing the components for these aircraft.

⁶ According to Spykman, the *Rimland* is functionally a vast region, south of Russia, that serves as a buffer zone or blockade of conflicts between land power, represented by Russia, and maritime power, represented by the States that exercise dominion at sea. In Europe, this phenomenon is represented by the millennial wars that occurred between Eastern Europe and the Russians in the buffer region of Eastern Europe. In the European East, Russia has fought against the Turks and English in several attempts to reach the ocean and be able to project itself through the sea (TOSTA, 1984).

⁷ Original text in English: "Turkey's location near several global hotspots has made the continuing availability of its territory for the stationing and transport of arms, cargo, and personnel valuable for the United States and NATO. From Turkey's perspective, NATO's traditional value has been to mitigate its concerns about encroachment by neighbors. Turkey initially turned to the West largely as a reaction to aggressive post-World War II posturing by the Soviet Union. In addition to Incirlik Air Base near the southern Turkish city of Adana, other key U.S./NATO sites include an early warning missile defense radar in eastern Turkey and a NATO ground forces command in Izmir. Turkey also controls access to and from the Black Sea through its straits pursuant to the Montreux Convention of 1936".

The S-400 agreement also triggered US sanctions. Former US President Donald Trump delayed such sanctions, while trying to persuade Turkey to refrain from operating the S-400s. The way the US responded to Turkey's acquisition of the S-400 could affect U.S. arms sales relative to other key partners that have purchased or will purchase advanced weapons from Russia, including India, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar. However, according to the analysts Zanotti and Thomas (2021), it is not clear how sanctions against Turkey could affect the US defense economy, trade and purchases.

Turkey, despite being a democracy and a NATO member State, has consoled itself for years with the hope of joining the European Union (EU), a fixation that the Turkish authorities have made clear to the economic bloc. However, in the first decade of the 21st century, it became clear that Turkey may never become an effective member of the European Union for an obtuse reason based on geographical and cultural determinism: the country is Muslim, which makes it unwanted, as it could be the largest gateway to Europe (KAPLAN, 2013).

For its part, Greece is also important for NATO. The country has special relevance due to the possibility of military use of its islands. Unlike Turkey, Greece has remained more faithful to the treaty, since it has not been the protagonist of the disputes with Turkey. However, due to disagreements as to the Cyprus issue, it temporarily withdrew from NATO between 1974 and 1980. According to the then Greek Prime Minister, Constantine Karamanlis (1907-1998), faced with the occupation of Cyprus by Turkey, in 1974, with the use of NATO military material, the only ways left to resolve the deadlock would be the following possibilities: "Withdraw from the Treaty or start a war with Turkey" (STEARNS, 1992, p. 68).

The disputes between Greece and Turkey cause several problems and vulnerabilities to the organization. These differences have historical origins and were not resolved when both countries joined the organization, nor even when the treaty represented defense against a common enemy, the former USSR, nor over more than half a century as member States. Thus, disputes between the two NATO member States continue to exist, as follows:

The coincidence of NATO's national and military missions explains why Greece and Turkey were able to make significant adjustments to their deployment of defense forces and plans without being directly challenged by NATO's Military and Defense Planning Committees. Although the more casual scrutiny of Greek and Turkish battle orders clearly showed that their forces in the Aegean theater were deployed primarily against each other, not against the Warsaw Pact, NATO chose to treat them as forces executing a national defense mission consistent with NATO's plans so as not to raise the most bothersome question of what threat they were defending themselves from⁸. (MANN, 2001, p. 55, emphasis added)

8 Original text in English: "*The coincidence of their national and NATO military missions explains why Greece and Turkey were able to make significant adjustments in their force deployments and defense plans without being directly challenged by NATO's Defense Planning and Military Committees. Although the most casual scrutiny of Greek and Turkish orders of battle clearly showed that their forces in the Aegean theater were deployed primarily against each other, not the Warsaw Pact, NATO chose to treat them as forces executing a national defense mission consistent with NATO plans and not to raise the more awkward question of what threat they were defending themselves against*".

5 THE SITUATION INVOLVING CYPRUS

After the World War II period, ethnic problems arose between Turks and Greeks due to religious differences between Muslims and Christians. In 1955, these oppositions were materialized in protests in Istanbul over ethnic issues in Cyprus, first when it was under British rule and later when it became an independent State. In 1959, an agreement was negotiated between the United Kingdom, Turkey and Greece to guarantee the independence of Cyprus and, consequently, the interests of the communities of these countries.⁹

In 1974, a group of Greek citizens of right-wing political party orientation, supported by the military dictatorship then in force in Greece, tried to take control of Cyprus, which led to Turkish intervention, declaring itself guarantor of rights on the island. Thus, Turkey invaded northern Cyprus, occupying about 40% of the island's territory, dividing it under the pretext of protecting the Turkish Cypriot minority, escalating military tensions between Turkey and Greece. To this day, the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus is recognized only by Turkey, while the Republic of Cyprus is recognized internationally.

Thus, there was again a recrudescence of historical rivalries between the two countries, with Cyprus being the pivot of the aggravation of these disputes, which still persist. Tensions culminated in cancellation of the cooperation pacts between Greece and Turkey, causing the collapse of the Balkan Pact¹⁰. In 1976, they signed the Berne Protocol, in which they agreed that they would not exploit the maritime areas beyond their sovereignty.

6 THE CATALYST OF CONTEMPORARY DISPUTES

Considering growing demands, especially in the economic sphere, there were increased efforts to strengthen legal regulation and establish levels of jurisdiction with relative international consensus. In 1982, UNCLOS was introduced, under the aegis of the UN, which initially had 116 signatory States, including Brazil, and defined the rights and duties of the States as to the maritime spaces (SOUZA, 2018).

UNCLOS, despite the need to reconcile the interests of different States, managed to standardize maritime use. It standardized criteria for defining maritime regions subject to the levels of sovereignty of the coastal State, which diminishes as the distance of these regions from the coastline increases. The defined regions were: Territorial Sea (TS), Contiguous Zone (CZ), Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), Continental Shelf (CS) (SOUZA, 2018).

9 The Treaty of Guarantee (1960) was established in the context of Cyprus' independence from British rule, which had lasted since 1914. This treaty was made possible after the Greek and Turkish communities reached an agreement on a constitution for the country, giving Great Britain, Greece and Turkey the right to intervene in Cyprus, as well as allowing the maintenance of British sovereignty over two military bases in Cyprus (MARCUS, 2011).

10 Because Yugoslavia turned to the West after a breakaway from the former USSR in 1948, a new front was opened in the Cold War. Thus, agreements were made by the Yugoslavs with Greece and Turkey, creating the Balkan Pact, initiated as a political agreement that was concluded in Ankara (Turkey), in February 1953. Through this pact, Yugoslavia was indirectly included in the Western defense system, strengthening its security (TERZIC, 2016).

With technological advancement, States felt the need to expand their waters to ensure security and exploit marine and subsurface marine resources. This extension of areas under sovereignty, territorial waters or TS, with a width of 12 nautical miles (NM), and under jurisdiction, the CS and the EEZ represent sources of several disputes, including those of the Aegean Sea and Eastern Mediterranean Sea.

The concept of EEZ, which allows for the exercise of jurisdiction over the 200 NM of the baseline of the neighboring State, was recognized by the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, concluded in Montego Bay, Jamaica, in December 1982. However, many countries acted before the signing of the convention, to establish their EEZs, such as France, which did so in 1976. These developments disturbed the relative stability of the Aegean Sea, respected since the end of World War II, and led to controversy regarding territorial and continental shelf waters, especially between Greece and Turkey.

In effect, there are two opposing historical realities that coexist in a mixture of reconciliation and resentment. The territorial division resulting from the Treaty of Lausanne and from the Treaty of Paris on February 10, 1947 seemed relatively stable (MANN, 2001).

Greece has approximately 2,500 islands in the Aegean Sea. Therefore, the establishment of an extension of TS, as provided for in UNCLOS, that is, with 12 NM, would give it control of 71% of these territorial waters, due to the existence of these islands, which would make it impossible for Turkish ships to reach the Mediterranean Sea without crossing Greek territorial waters. Historically, Greece extended its territorial waters to 6 NM by means of a law instituted in September 1936. Therefore, Greek territorial waters cover 43.5% of the Aegean Sea, while Turkish territorial waters represent only 7.5%. With UNCLOS, the high seas area would be reduced from 49% to 19.7%. Consequently, if the two countries established EEZs, as defined by the convention, the remaining space (19.7%) would fall entirely under the jurisdiction of Athens (REPUBLIC OF TÜRKIYE, 2021).

This is one of the factors that explain why Turkey always exerted pressure on its neighbor, claiming that the extension of Greek territorial waters to 12 NM would represent a *casus belli*¹¹ (REPUBLIC OF TÜRKIYE, 2021). The Turkish Parliament endorsed this position with a resolution approved in June 1995, shortly after the ratification of the UNCLOS by Greece. The difficulty arises from the fact that, subject to the Convention, ships of all States, whether coastal or land-locked, enjoy the right of innocent passage through the territorial sea of another State. This right involves restrictions for military vessels and submarines, which are required to sail on the surface and can be regulated by the coastal State (MANN, 2001). Thus, with the 12-NM extension of Greek territorial waters in the Aegean Sea, Turkish warships coming from the Bosphorus Strait or Smyrna would be subject to the limitations of the right of innocent passage or even to the regulations adopted by Athens.

In November 1973, the Turkish government authorized fuel research zones for the Turkish State Petroleum Company in the area located between the Greek islands of Lesbos, Skyros, Limnos and west of Samothrace. In July 1974, Turkey issued new permits extending

¹¹ *Casus belli* is an expression to designate a fact considered sufficiently serious by the offended State to declare war on the allegedly offending State.

this zone to the west and claimed a new narrow portion of the continental shelf located between the Greek islands of the Dodecanese and Cyclades. Greece, for its part, strongly protested against these attitudes. Turkey, however, sent oceanographic ships to the contested area: the Çandarlı in May-June 1974; and the Sismik I in August 1976, whose mission led the two countries to the brink of armed conflict.

Their positions can then be summarized as follows: according to Greece, international law and especially the UNCLOS resolution on CS gives the islands the right to exercise jurisdiction over their CS and specifies that the platform between two countries should be defined on the basis of the midline between the two States. Thus, each of the Aegean Sea islands has its CS and the borders with Turkey should be defined on the basis of that line. According to Turkey, the Greek islands do not have the right to exercise jurisdiction on the platform as they are located on the Turkish CS. In fact, the special circumstances mentioned by UNCLOS about the CS, as per its art. 6.2, justify, in this case, the non-application of the midline method.

Given the unsuccessful agreement, Greece submitted the dispute to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in August 1976, but Turkey refused to recognize the jurisdiction of the court, which ultimately declared itself incompetent. The maritime issue has remained since then and has been aggravated by territorial disputes. International law, however, has evolved, affecting the position of the countries and increasing dissensions. According to Greece, UNCLOS represented a reinforcement in its understanding by specifying that coastal States could extend the area of their territorial waters to 12 NM, while, according to Turkey, the convention represented a strengthening of its understanding by removing any reference to the midline in the delimitation of the CS. In effect, as per the Convention, the delimitation of territorial waters, as well as of the EEZ, should be carried out by agreement, based on international law, in order to reach an equitable solution, pursuant to the prescriptions of Articles 74 and 83 of UNCLOS.

Turkey is one of the States that refused to sign the convention because it refused the possibility of extending the width of territorial waters to 12 NM. Therefore, the Convention cannot be applied to Turkey, in theory, but jurisprudence increasingly tends to consider that its main provisions, nevertheless, belong to international law. In this sense, the jurisprudence fills the UNCLOS gaps on the delimitation of maritime spaces. UNCLOS lacks methods for delimitation of maritime spaces, which has been progressively covered by the jurisprudence of the ICJ, which established applicable principles. Thus, that court defined the notions of equidistance, as well as special circumstances for the delimitation of the territorial sea and equitable principles for the continental shelf and the EEZ.

The Greek government, in 1987, began oil exploration near the island of Thasos, self-declared Greek but claimed by Turkey. In response, the Turkish government sent a research vessel escorted by warships to the same region. In an escalation of tensions, the Greek prime minister initially ordered the sinking of the Turkish research vessel, subsequently backtracking, which intensified the crisis between the two countries (STANICEK, 2020).

In the 1990s, tension increased. During the geopolitical issues of the Cold War (1947-1989), both, through NATO, aligned themselves against a common enemy and had, in a way, to leave disagreements in the background. After this phase, the two countries were able to dive

deeper into their individual interests and pursue their own goals, which rekindled tensions (MANN, 2001).

7 THE ENERGY ISSUE

After discovering the great potential for natural gas exploitation in the eastern Mediterranean Sea, relations in the region are being transformed and historical rivalries between Greece and Turkey are re-emerging amid geopolitical changes in the region. In July 2020, tensions between the two countries intensified due to Turkish oil and gas research activities in contested waters in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea, in an area of natural gas reserves recently discovered by Israel, Egypt and Cyprus, as shown in Figure 2. After the intervention of Germany, as EU representative, in order to mitigate the increased tension, both sides committed to dialogue for resolving the conflict.

Figure 2 – Map of the Maritime Dispute Area



Source: MARCUS, 2020

Energy security is increasingly an important factor in the strategy and geopolitics of States, seeking economic development and a prominent position on the international scene. However, in order to achieve better energy security conditions, actions to avoid the risk of energy shortages or to reduce the instability of lack of access to these sources may lead a State to apply strategic measures that go beyond diplomacy on certain occasions, being incisive in the international system so as to unilaterally achieve its objectives.

It should be noted that there are several divergences between Turks and Greeks regarding rights in the Aegean and Mediterranean Seas, which have intensified in recent years, mainly due to the Turks' high dependence on oil and gas imports, associated with recent discoveries of hydrocarbon reserves in the region, in addition to estimates of large undiscovered reserves (MARCUS, 2020).

According to Turkey, the final maritime borders can only be determined through agreements, not by violating possible third party borders, or through litigation. Thus, the country claims that it is ready to start maritime border delimitation negotiations with all neighboring countries except the Greek Cypriots. The demarcation in the west of the Cyprus island should take place after the most comprehensive solution of the Cyprus issue. The Turkish position is that the Cyprus island to the west and the Greek islands in the area, including Kastellorizo, cannot generate full EEZ/CS under international law, and the equal rights of Turkish Cypriots as co-owners of the island must be guaranteed immediately. Thus, Turkey will continue its research and drilling activities in the licensed areas of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus unless the equal rights of Turkish Cypriots over *offshore* resources are guaranteed, as shown in Figure 2.

Additionally, the Turkish government has spread the concept of Blue Homeland (*Mavi Vatan* in Turkish). The term is an abbreviation of the Turkish claim that the 1920 Treaty of Sèvres, which ended hostilities between the Ottoman Empire and the Allied powers, unduly stripped Turkey of many of its historic islands and maritime possessions in the Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean seas¹² (RODRIGUEZ, 2020).

It is noted that Turkey has adopted an increasingly aggressive foreign policy in the Eastern Mediterranean sea, sending drillships accompanied by warships into waters claimed by Cyprus, which had already been leased by the Cypriot government to foreign oil companies. Such aggression towards its Mediterranean neighbours led to a deterioration of its relations with the EU, in particular with France, which despite showing its neorealist stance, runs the risk of Ankara isolating itself diplomatically.

France has long been Greece's closest ally in Europe, sharing political values and cultural bonds. For its part, as a NATO and EU member country, France is prominent in the region with economic interests in Northern Africa, mainly through close relations with Greece, including joint military exercises in the Mediterranean Sea. Despite this close diplomatic relation of these two States and a distance from Turkey, which sees the EU as partial on the issue of maritime disputes, the influence – through economic power – of another European country, in this case, Germany, can also be observed. The German leadership in Europe is an important point in the geopolitical scene, since Berlin can play an active role in the crisis. In this regard, Germany has already played this role of European mediator in the disputes between Greece and Turkey, seeking to ensure EU interests and avoid an undesirable conflict between two NATO members (STANICEK, 2020).

The development of gas fields in the eastern Mediterranean Sea would be easier with Turkish cooperation. Israel, Cyprus and Egypt, however, are resisting Turkey's attempt to devote itself to developing these gas fields. In response, Turkey implied that it will block the *EastMed* pipeline construction project and that it may send military forces to do so (AUTRAN, 2021).

12 Restoring these possessions would allow Turkey to secure an additional 178,000 square miles of the Mediterranean Sea under Turkish control (RODRIGUEZ, 2020).

In January 2021, Greece, Cyprus and Israel signed an agreement to build an underwater gas pipeline that will transport large amounts of natural gas to Europe, in which Turkey is not a participant, according to Figure 3. In addition, Greece, Cyprus, Israel, Egypt, Italy, Jordan, the United Arab Emirates and the Palestinian Authority are united in the US-backed East Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF). For its part, Turkey, excluded from said forum, denounced it as an *anti-Turkish* club (AUTRAN, 2021).

Figure 3 – The EastMed project, connecting Eastern Mediterranean countries

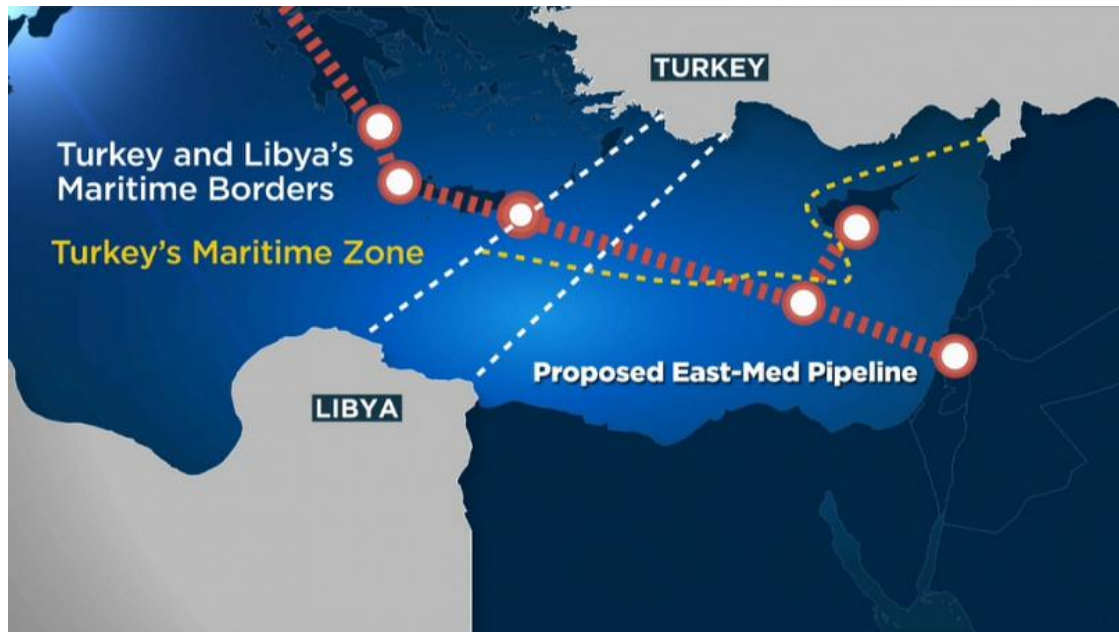


Source: AUTRAN, 2021

Turkey and Greece seek to meet energy needs through competition between their governments, aiming for lower external energy dependence on oil and gas. This situation can be observed through the recent discoveries of oil and gas in the eastern Mediterranean Sea, a fact that gave rise to a series of adverse events between the two States in search of meeting the demands of each country, taking into consideration the anarchic character of the international system.

In this context, the recent gas discoveries in the eastern Mediterranean Sea have served the strategy of increasing energy security, as evidenced by Turkey's policy towards Libya. In effect, two memoranda of understanding were signed with the Libyan Government of National Accord (GNA): the Delimitation of Maritime Jurisdiction Areas in the Mediterranean Sea and the Security and Military Cooperation Agreement (MARCUS, 2020).

The first agreement demarcated Turkey's maritime borders with Libya, with the bilateral creation of an EEZ extending from the Mediterranean coast of southern Turkey to the northeastern coast of Libya, disregarding the main Greek islands, such as Crete, as shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4 – Libyan-Turkish Maritime Agreement

Source: MENÉNDEZ, 2020

The second agreement enabled the GNA to resist Libyan National Army (LNA) leader Khalifa Hifter's offensive to take over Tripoli, as Turkey provided direct military support to the GNA. At a time when GNA's desperate requests for military support from European actors had no effect, the maritime border agreement was essentially the price to be paid to Turkey in exchange for military cooperation (MENÉNDEZ, 2020). Thus, the maritime border agreement was more related with the eastern Mediterranean Sea than with Libya. According to the resolution, the proposed Israel-Greece-Cyprus pipeline would have to pass through maritime areas claimed by Turkey, as per the Turkish-GNA maritime treaty, thus conveying Turkey's intention to halt any projects aimed at circumventing it.

However, as the agreements disregard important Greek islands, for example Crete and Rhodes, they are highly contested on the international sphere. For its part, Greece reacted forcefully, expelling the GNA ambassador from Athens and cultivating closer ties with the Libyan National Army (LNA), GNA's antagonist in the Libyan Civil War. Such attitude not only intensified the tension between Ankara and Athens, but also paved the way for Greece to sign a resolution with similar terms with Egypt in August 2020 to delimit their respective maritime jurisdictions.

The Turkish-Libyan agreement conflicts with the Greek view of its own maritime borders, while the Greek-Egyptian agreement produces the same effect with regard to Turkey. The connection between Turkey's policy in Libya as well as the strategic movements in the eastern Mediterranean Sea are expressed by the *Mavi Vatan* doctrine, or Turkish Blue Homeland, constituting Ankara's main geopolitical concept for the eastern Mediterranean Sea and establishing its neorealist stance.

In practice, it is possible to define the maritime agreement with Libya as a neorealist strategic positioning. While this concept has no legal basis, it indicates Turkey's determination to defend and safeguard these projected borders, or at least try to confirm that impression. Secondly, the Blue Homeland is Turkey's call to project a possible repositioning of the country, representing the reorientation of Turkey's foreign and security policies in relation to Russia and China, which makes them a matter of national security for Greece, consequently affecting the EU.

8 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Kenneth Waltz's neorealism aims to understand the main causes of war in international relations through the analysis of three images: man, States and the State system. However, this has been the major influence in the case of wars, but which balances international relations between States, maintaining or negotiating peace.

The late twentieth century saw the rise of new international actors, which aim at cooperation between States in an anarchic international system, such as the UN and EU, making these relations more complex.

Turkey and Greece are NATO member States and pose a challenge to NATO planners, as differences must be taken into consideration in conducting training involving both countries. In addition, there was sometimes the risk of a war involving the belligerence of the two countries, which came very close to occurring in 1974, on the occasion of the Turkish invasion of Cyprus and, recently, on the occasion of the energy disputes in the Eastern South Sea.

The crises between Greece and Turkey are related to the process of formation of both States. In this sense, there are several examples, since the end of the Ottoman Empire, that unfold today through the situation of Cyprus and the maritime disputes. The differences between the two States were catalyzed by the recent discovery of energy resources in the Mediterranean Sea, which guarantee energy security and protagonism for these countries.

Greece is an EU member State, while Turkey is not. This difference has led to partnerships with other actors. Greece has been supported by France, which has affinities in the international system. Turkey clearly has a strategic pendulum movement, sometimes approaching the West, through partnership with the US and negotiations with the EU, sometimes approaching the East through bilateral partnerships and agreements with Russia.

This context of disputes has been aggravated by the recent discovery of energy resources that has motivated the disputes over Cyprus and the establishment of bilateral agreements between Greece and Egypt, or between Turkey and Libya, for divisions of maritime spaces in the international system.

For a peaceful solution to the current maritime dispute in the Mediterranean Sea, Greece and Turkey must be willing to establish an intermediate solution, which can be mediated by the EU or, more specifically, by Germany, whose foreign policy shows good relations with both States, in order to maintain the stability of relations of the countries bordering the Aegean Sea and the eastern Mediterranean Sea.

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