



### Tensions Escalate in the Eastern Mediterranean as the European Union Calls for Dialogue with Turkey

Tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean have reached a boiling point in recent days, as Greece and the European Union remain locked in a dispute with Turkey over the Mediterranean's vast energy resources. In recent weeks, Turkish seismic vessels have begun exploration missions searching for energy reserves in disputed Mediterranean territory also claimed by Greece. Greece believes that the scattered Greek islands around the Mediterranean expand its exclusive economic zone, but this is disputed by Turkey which argues Greece's interpretation is in violation of international law and encroaches upon the exclusive economic zone off the Turkish coast. Further increasing tensions has been Greece's decision to deploy troops to Kastellorizo, a Greek island that has been demilitarized since 1947 under an agreement that handed the island to Greece from Italy via Turkey. Additionally, there has been a Greek military build-up on 16 of the 23 Greek islands in the Mediterranean, all of which are supposed to be demilitarized under the 1947 Paris Peace Treaty. Greece has received the support of NATO and the European Union, but Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan pledged not to yield, and to defend Turkey's interests and sovereignty in the Mediterranean.

In recent months, Turkey has stepped up its pursuit of underwater energy resources. Last November, Turkey and Libya signed an agreement creating an exclusive economic agreement from Turkey's southeastern Mediterranean coast to Libya's northeastern coast. In early August, Egypt and Greece signed a rival agreement, that demarcated maritime boundaries for an exclusive economic zone (EEZ) between the countries to develop oil and gas drilling. Greece also signed an EEZ agreement with Italy, further strengthening the European coalition against Turkey and its interests in the region. Frustratingly for Turkey, the European Union denounced the Turkey-Libya accord as illegal under international law, but was silent on the development of the other agreements implemented by Greece. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has showed no signs of backing down over his country's resource exploration missions, despite the interference from the European Union, and France in particular.

French President Emmanuel Macron said he was adopting a "red-line" over Turkish exploration in the Mediterranean, which was swiftly condemned by Ankara. Further suggestions from the European Union that Turkey was breaching international law through its exploration are questionable, given the Greek military build-up on its islands that are demilitarized under the 1947 Paris Peace Treaty. Turkish officials have pointed to the militarization of Kastellorizo in particular as being cause for concern in regard to Turkish security given its proximity to Turkey's coast. Greece, in keeping with its belief that each of its islands are entitled to their own continental shelf with exclusive drilling rights, has continued to increase its presence on Kastellorizo, despite Turkey's claim that it encroaches upon its EEZ off its Mediterranean coast. There is also a faction of Turkish historians who believe that Kastellorizo should be a Turkish territory, as it was until 1947. President Erdogan has made statements lending credence to this, saying in a 2016 speech that the Mediterranean islands closest to Turkey, like Kastellorizo, were wrongly handed over by incompetent former Turkish officials during post-war peace negotiations. As such, Turkey believes that the terms of these past treaties were unfair to them and that its actions in the Eastern Mediterranean are therefore justifiable. The dispute between Greece and Turkey over territory in the Mediterranean has stretched for decades, and the recent flare-up indicates a solution isn't likely in the near future.