

**SOUTHEASTERN MEDITERRANEAN SEA 2020:  
EVENTS - EVOLUTION - PERSPECTIVES REGARDING THE  
EXPLOITATION OF HYDROCARBONS AIMING AT  
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF INVOLVED COUNTRIES**

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**Abstract**

*In an era when states seek to determine their maritime zones to secure their exploitation rights over the existing hydrocarbon deposits to meet their sustainable development goals, Turkey's position on questioning and denying to sign the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) creates tensions in the Southeastern Mediterranean region.*

*Basic concepts of UNCLOS and critical agreements signed between states are described in this article, which seeks to give background and shade light in a complex situation.*

**Keywords:** *Sustainable Development, Hydrocarbons, Law of the Sea, Maritime Zones, Mediterranean Sea.*

**1. Introduction**

The events of May 2020 in Southeastern Mediterranean Sea reminisce a war scene. The continuous violation of airspace and maritime borders of Greece and Cyprus by Turkey, the arbitrary and illegal delimitation of maritime zones of the countries belonging to the wider area from Turkey -in complete violation of the provisions of the Law of the Sea of 1982-and finally the exploration mission on the cypriotic exclusive economic zone (EEZ) by turkish research vessels accompanied by warships in addition to their continuous presence on the greek continental shelf, have created a tensed atmosphere in the region.

Although the Law of the Sea clearly defines the way maritime zones are determined, Turkey denies implementing this international treaty, creating as such a lot of problems in the Southeastern Mediterranean Sea.

In the last 20 years, countries have prioritized sustainable development, relying heavily on securing energy reserves. Europe is trying to stop the use of lignite (European Commission Press, 2020) by substituting polluting energy sources with environmental friendly alternatives like natural gas and renewable energy sources. Southeastern Mediterranean seems to have huge quantities of natural gas, thus creating enormous interest for their exploitation.

As a result, the demarcation of the EEZ, continental shelf and territorial waters of the states of the region, is creating great tension (Lapanidis, 2019). Greece, Turkey, Egypt, Libya and Cyprus are trying to secure the exploitation rights of the existing hydrocarbon deposits in order to meet their sustainable development goals.

In addition to the above, the maritime borders of Greece with 6 countries (Albania-Italy-Libya-Egypt-Cyprus-Turkey) makes even more complex the delimitation of maritime zones falling under its domain.

**2. Basic concepts**

The 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) was ratified in 1994 by 60 countries and since then entered into force (Andreas Stalidis, 2020). Today this

agreement has been signed by 168 countries and is considered to be a codification of the International Law. Only 15 coastal countries have not yet signed the UNCLOS including Turkey, Israel, Venezuela and Syria.

Figure 1 shows in detail the maritime zones (rosa.gr.politiki, 2020), as being defined.

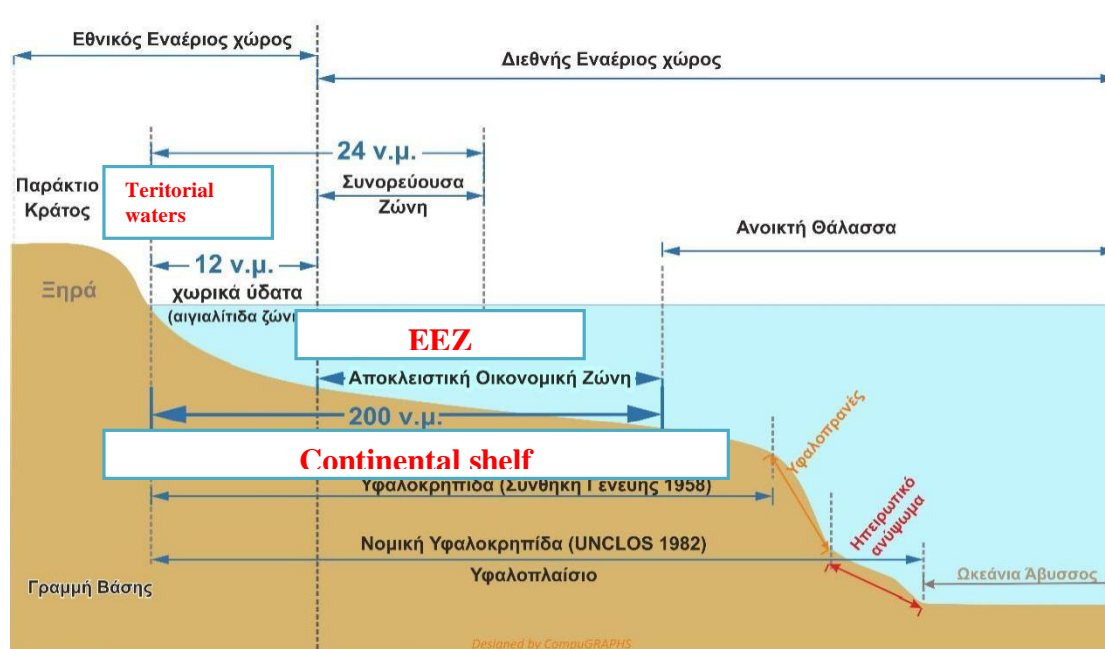


Figure 1. Maritime zones according to UNCLOS (1982)

## 2.1 Territorial waters

Territorial waters is the sea zone next to the coast of a state and is considered as national territory. According to UNCLOS, territorial waters can reach 12 nautical miles (Apostolidis, 2020). Safe passage of foreign ships is allowed in the territorial waters of the country (under national control).

Greece since 1947 has territorial waters of 6 nautical miles. Since January 2021, following the agreement between Greece and Italy on the EEZ, the territorial waters of Greece in the Ionian Sea have been extended to 12 nautical miles. In case Greece extends its territorial waters to 12 nautical miles in the Aegean Sea, it will control 72% of the Aegean, from 42% it has today (Sirigos, 2020). Turkey will control 8,5% from 7,1% it currently has and international waters will be reduced to 19% from the current 49%.

## 2.2 Continental shelf

Continental shelf is the part of the smooth extension of the coast below sea level, until the point where it stops abruptly with a slope of 30%-45%. Its length can reach 200 nautical miles.

In this zone, each state has the right for the minerals of the soil and subsoil of the seabed, for the non-living organisms, as well as for the living organisms belonging to the sedentary species that cannot move (corals, sponges, etc.).

According to the Law of the Sea, all islets not covered by the winter wave, which can maintain humans, or autonomous economic life (cultivation, stock farming) have continental shelf.

Islets that do not meet these conditions have only territorial waters and not an EEZ-continental shelf.

### **2.3 Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ)**

The EEZ comprises an area beyond territorial waters, in which the state assumes jurisdiction over the exploration and exploitation of marine resources below sea level, at the ocean floor and in its subsoil. The potential of energy production from water and wind is included as well.

The EEZ can reach 200 nautical miles from the shore of the mainland. In case another country intervenes, EEZ is usually set in the midline. The establishment of EEZ is an achievement for island states, including Greece.

### **2.4 Article 15 of the Law of the Sea: Delimitation of the territorial sea between States with opposite or adjacent coasts**

Where the coasts of two states are opposite or adjacent to each other, neither of the two States is entitled to extend its territorial sea beyond the midline. The above provision does not apply, however, where it is necessary by reason of historic title or other special circumstances to delimit the territorial seas of the two States in a way which is at variance therewith.

### **2.5 NAVTEX**

The International Ship Information Service for urgent maritime and meteorological information.

NAVTEX emits from onshore stations and is used to issue distress signals, coordinate rescue operations at sea etc.

## **3. Crucial events**

While the Law of the Sea of 1982 clearly defines maritime zones, Turkey insists on non-recognizing it, which is the root cause of everything which is happening in the Southeastern Mediterranean.

Lets record the events in chronological order.

### **3.1. Signature of a Memorandum regarding maritime zones between Turkey and Libya**

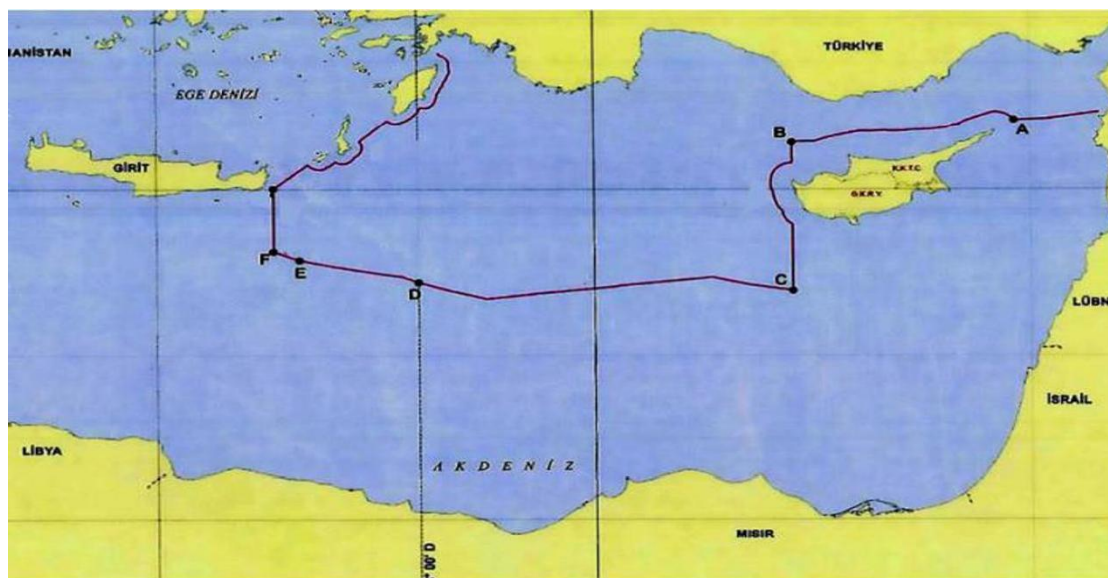
On 27<sup>th</sup> November 2019 Turkey and Libya signed a memorandum, which defines the continental shelf.

On 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2019 map 1 was published, showing the continental shelf of Turkey [naftemporiki 2019], deleting greek island Kastellorizo from the map, claiming that islands with substantially smaller coastline compared to the coastline of Turkey do not have continental shelf and EEZ.

This map shows the following in relation to Turkey:

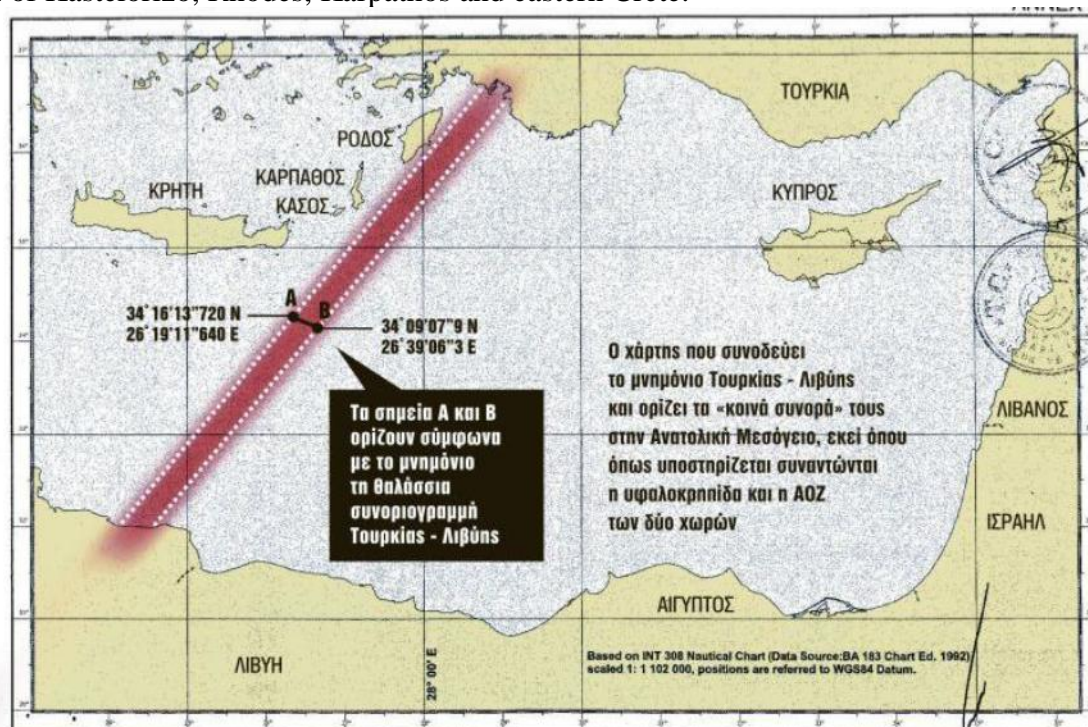
- a. Demarcation of continental shelf and EEZ with the pseudo-state of the Turkish Cypriots.
- b. Demarcation of continental shelf and EEZ with Egypt with a midline.
- c. Demarcation of continental shelf and EEZ with Libya, according to the memorandum signed between the two countries.
- d. Unilateral demarcation of maritime zones with Greece.
- e. Kastellorizo island deleted from the map.

This agreement is illegal [A.Genimatas], since it is base on the assumption that islands do not have continental shelf and EEZ which is completely contrary to the Law of the Sea.



Map 1. Continental shelf of Turkey according to the memorandum between Turkey and Libya

Map 2 shows Turkey's proximity to Libya, ignoring the right of the continental shelf and the EEZ of Kastelorizo, Rhodes, Karpathos and eastern Crete.



Map 2. Proximity of Turkey with Libya (Points A and B define the maritime boarder of Turkey with Libya)

### 3.2. The turkish research vessel Oruc-Reis violates the greek continental shelf

On 31<sup>st</sup> January 2020 the turkish research vessel Oruc-Reis, accompanied by warships (Charalampakis, 2020) (map 3) και possible a submarine, entered in the greek continental shelf.

On 21<sup>st</sup> October 2020, 24 years after the incident at Imia, the turkish ship approached up to 30 nautical miles (Polatos, 2020) the islets cluster of Megisti (Kastelorizo, Stroglyi and 12 other islets) and up to 46 nautical miles the island of Rhodes. In two cases it even broke the 12 nautical miles from the greek coasts (CNN Greece, 2020).

As a reminder, the extension of a country's territorial waters from 6 to 12 nautical miles is, under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea [U.N UNCLOS 2020], a right of unilateral action of each country.

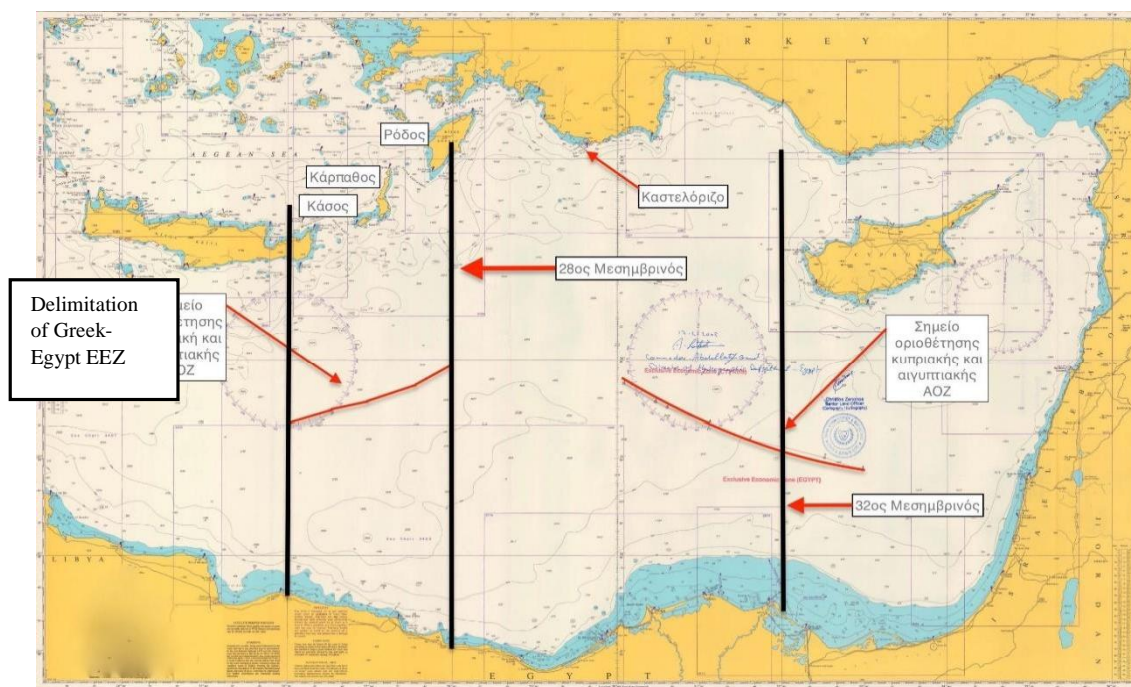


Map 3. Course of the turkish research vessel on the greek continental shelf

### 3.3 Agreement between Greece and Egypt for the EEZ

In June 2020, after 15 years of efforts, Greece and Egypt agreed on the delimitation of the EEZ and the continental shelf, between the 26th and 28th meridians [CNN Greece 2020] (map 4), leaving the rest of the demarcation for future discussion. The agreement has the following effects:

- a. It effectively annuls the Turkey-Libya agreement on the demarcation of the EEZ-continental shelf.
- b. It gives the 45% to Greece and the 55% to Egypt of the intermediate maritime zone.
- c. Accepts the limited influence of the greek islands of Crete-Rhodes-Kasos-Karpathos.
- d. Regarding the small part of Crete included in the agreement, the influence of the EEZ is at 90% (this means 90% from the middle line between the two coasts)



Map 4. Delimitation of EEZ between Greece-Egypt

The majority of Crete was not included in the agreement. In specific only the shore of the long coast of Ierapetra and the cortage-iron of Sitia [G Georgakakis 2020] have been included.

### 3.4 Agreement between Greece and Italy for the EEZ

On 9<sup>th</sup> June 2020, Greece and Italy signed an agreement for the determination of their EEZ [jeidiseis 2020] (map 5).

The delimitation of the EEZ coincides with that of the continental shelf which the two countries signed back in 1977 based on the Law of the Sea. The agreement has the following effects:

- a. Confirmation of the delimitation of maritime zones according to 1977.
- b. Preservation of Italy's fishing rights [Thodoris Kariotis 2020] in the area of 6-12 nautical miles, when Greece extends its territorial waters to 12 nautical miles, major point of confrontation between the two countries to date.
- c. Acceptance by Italy that island have EEZ and CS according to the Law for the Sea.
- d. Greece accepted permitted influence of EEZ for the complex of Diapondia islands, 75% for Othonoi island and 50% for Strofades.

Diapondia islands are a complex of 11 Greek islands, with the largest being Othonoi with 395 inhabitants, Ereikousa with 496 and Marathaki with 329. Strofades complex consists of two small Greek islands.



Map 5. Delimitation of EEZ between Greece-Italy

#### 4. The importance of the continuation between greek and cypriot eez

The full influence of the Greek islands in the delimitation of the Greek EEZ, quadruples the sea area in which Greece can exercise sovereign rights.

Recognizing the full influence of the EEZ in the Kastelorizo complex and especially of the easternmost islet of Strongyli (Stampolis, 2018), is of great importance for Greece because only in this way there will be a continuation of the greek EEZ with the cypriot one (map 6). This continuity could be used for the passage of hydrocarbon pipelines between the Middle East and Europe. This element greatly strengthens the geopolitical position of Greece, while weakens the one of Turkey. Today this communication is mainly controlled by Turkey, by land and sea.



Map 6. EEZ in the SE Mediterranean sea according to the Law of the Sea

## **5. Conclusions, review and evaluation of the situation in southeastern Mediterranean sea**

The root cause of the tension occurred in Southeastern Mediterranean sea, is Turkey's position on the Law of the Sea which she questions and denies to sign.

Neighboring countries need to agree on the definition of maritime zones, except of the territorial waters, which can unilaterally be extended by national governments, up to 12 nautical miles.

Turkey completely illegally does not accept the right of Aegean islands on EEZ-continental shelf considering that maritime zones should be defined according to the basis of opposite continental shores. The EEZ of countries with opposite shores is defined by the midline [Nele Mats Lyk 2020].

Turkey has focused on the complex of Kastelorizo islands and particularly on islet Strogili, mainly because applying the Law of the Sea on that area means that greek and cypriot EEZ are connected. This communication is of great importance, because it enables the development of hydrocarbon transport pipelines from the Middle East to Europe (Ioakimidis 2020). This is exactly the advantage that Turkey does not want, which seeks the pipelines to pass through its own territory.

An important issue for Greece is its territorial waters in the Aegean Sea. If Greece extends its territorial waters from the current 6 nautical miles to 12, then it will control 72% of the Aegean Sea from its current 43%, reducing international waters to 19% from 49% (Michalopoulos, 2020) today and finally Turkey will have 8.5% of the 7.1% it currently controls (Zerde, 2017).

In such a case, the claimed EEZ part between Greece and Turkey will be limited to 5%, i.e. an insignificant difference. Such an arrangement is not welcomed by the United States and Russia. By the US because it has strategic interests in the Pontus and by Russia because it considers the Aegean Sea as its only access to the Mediterranean. The Turks consider such a move a cause of war (casus belli).

The delimitation of Greece's EEZ with Italy and Egypt was the answer to the Turkish-Libyan pact. This agreement came with concessions on the issue of the influence of the EEZ on some islands.

From the EU-US-RUSSIA side, Turkey's illegal and provocative tactics were dealt only with condemnatory statements, but not by imposing sanctions (Ntavoutoglou, 2021).

The political change that has taken place in the United States can and must help restore legitimacy in the region, on the basis of the Law of the Sea.

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