

07/11/2020

Deep sea rivals: Europe, Turkey, and new EMED conflict lines

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[...]

The EU has a direct stake in the matter, but remains divided on how to approach it. The bloc has a significant interest in upholding the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Cyprus, securing its own energy interests, and advancing a political resolution to the conflict in Libya to manage refugee and terrorism challenges. The anti-Turkey front that has converged in the eastern Mediterranean is led by EU member states Cyprus, Greece, and France. They, in turn, are working with players from further afield, such as the United Arab Emirates, whose intensifying competition with Turkey is a defining feature of the strained – and ever-more destabilising – situation in the Middle East. But, collectively, these countries' activity risks entrenching geopolitical fault lines, with consequences for Europe as a whole, not least the crucial relationship with Turkey.

To address this, the EU and its member states need to change tack and pursue a wider, inclusive deal with Turkey. They will need to incrementally agree on the components of this new bargain and, critically, base it on pragmatic engagement with Ankara rather than escalatory measures against it. Europe's decision-makers are aware that they cannot afford a complete diplomatic breakdown, much less a kinetic confrontation, with Turkey given the world of trouble already present on their eastern and southern flanks.

This awareness needs to translate into a policy shift in which Europeans remain committed to key policy principles – namely, the sovereignty of Cypriot and, therefore, EU territory – but also recognise the dangers of current tensions with Ankara, as well as the convergence of Middle Eastern conflict lines within areas of their dispute. This approach can only succeed if Turkey also demonstrates its support for it by scaling back its drilling activity and naval presence in the eastern Mediterranean. Europeans should incentivise Turkey to do so by dialling down the recent military and political measures they have put in place. This will help prevent the dispute from slipping into increasingly zero-sum and dangerous positioning, while dispelling the impression that Europe has ganged up on Turkey in a common cause with Arab states.

New gas fields and the anti-Turkey club

Cyprus is central to the eastern Mediterranean's rising tensions. After more than 40 years of frozen conflict, over the past decade hopes rose that the discovery of significant gas reserves could improve the chances of a settlement between the island's Turkish and Greek communities. In the process, gas exports from Cyprus would help the EU diversify its energy supplies and boost regional cooperation. In time, however, a different impulse took over – one that is now increasing tension between not just Cyprus and Turkey but also between wider regional players.

A collective interest in leveraging eastern Mediterranean gas reserves spurred increased cooperation between Greece, Cyprus, Israel, and Egypt, as well as key energy companies from Italy and France. This grouping has grown to encompass Italy itself, Jordan, and Palestine, culminating in the creation of the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF) in Cairo in January 2019. Noticeably absent is Turkey – despite its overlapping maritime claims, vast domestic market, and potential as a transit route for eastern Mediterranean gas exports. This coalition has received the backing of the United States, whose relationship with Turkey is also strained due to divergences on a growing number of issues, most recently Ankara's purchase of Russian-made S-400 air defence systems.

Although the desire to create a geopolitical hub that excludes Turkey was not the organisation's founding purpose, it has grown to define the emerging coalition. Perceptions of the EMGF as an anti-Turkey club were bolstered when it extended its remit to include regional security cooperation and joint military drills around Cyprus. Greece and Cyprus have sought to leverage the undersea gas reserves and the creation of the EMGF grouping to improve their own political standing – at Turkey's expense. The forum offers both countries a means to strengthen a broader alliance to counter Turkish influence. Israel and Egypt maintain acrimonious relations with Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan, while the forum's anti-Turkey slant has also attracted the UAE, which is engaged in an acute regional rivalry with Turkey. Like Egypt, the UAE takes issue with Turkey's support for Muslim Brotherhood movements across the region.

This fault line is starkest in Libya, where Turkey and the UAE provide military support to opposite sides in the deepening civil war. In November 2019, Ankara and the internationally recognised Libyan government struck a partnership agreement on a maritime boundary, which created an exclusive economic zone that cuts across Greek and Cypriot interests. The move seeks to preclude the proposed EastMed pipeline, which would bring gas to European markets from Israel, Egypt, and Cyprus. Turkey has also recently applied for licences to start drilling off the coast of Libya.

This agreement caused Cyprus and Greece to line up behind Abu Dhabi's man in Libya, Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar, who France has long supported. But these fault lines also extend into Syria, with supporters of both sides of the civil war hiring Syrian fighters. This draws the Libya and Syria conflicts closer together – and gives Russia a greater opportunity to cement its position in the Mediterranean.

Turkey: Backed into a corner?

The Turkish government has long suffered from a chronic siege mentality, believing itself to be surrounded by hostile forces that threaten its core interests. The formation of the EMGF appears to vindicate such concerns.

Turkey has little room for manoeuvre to its south and west, despite having the longest contiguous coastline in the eastern Mediterranean. Ankara also believes that making concessions in this part of the sea would be tantamount to conceding to the Greek position on various maritime disputes between the two countries in the Aegean. Turkey's difficulties are exacerbated by its failure to discover gas in its local waters. Given its own economic woes, Turkey will not cede the potentially lucrative exploitation rights around Cyprus without representation for Turkish Cypriots. Turkey has long favoured a model that allocates maritime rights based on continental shelves. But this differs from the approach adopted by European states, which is based on the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, to which Turkey is not a signatory.

From Ankara's perspective, there are clear links between this eastern Mediterranean coalition – as embodied by the EMGF – and wider regional conflicts, as well as the Emirati-led campaign against Turkey. Turkey believes that a slowly emerging superstructure of political, economic, and security interests will inevitably challenge its regional position. This has transformed an economic competition into an existential struggle. Turkey has responded in its traditional fashion – with escalation: namely, by increasing its military presence in Libya and concluding the maritime agreement with the Tripoli-based government. In parallel, Turkey has deployed naval expeditions to explore gas fields claimed by the Republic of Cyprus and to chase away research vessels operating under Republic of Cyprus licences.

Navigating the region's choppy waters

The EU's current eastern Mediterranean policy centres on a 'soft containment' of Turkey, as marked by its introduction of new sanctions on the country in February 2020. These measures came at the request of Cyprus, Greece, France, and Italy in a bid to curtail Turkey's predatory drilling expeditions. This dynamic was further highlighted in May 2020 in a joint declaration by Cyprus, France, Greece, Egypt, and the UAE, which "urged Turkey to fully respect the sovereignty and sovereign rights of all states in their maritime zones in the eastern Mediterranean ... [and] strongly condemned Turkey's military interference in Libya". Turkey responded by accusing the states of forming an "alliance of evil" that would create "regional chaos and instability".

Clearly, the EU is right to stick up for the sovereignty of the Cyprus and its maritime claims: the bloc's non-recognition of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) is a pillar of its legal policy on the island. Nevertheless, the exclusionary approach towards Turkey in the eastern Mediterranean has contributed to escalation in Cyprus, as well as Libya, where European interests relating to migration and terrorism are directly under threat. This wider confrontation has also drawn the UAE more deeply into the Mediterranean theatre, a development that should be as much a cause for European concern as Turkey's widening role. The threat of a confrontation with Turkey on Libya and wider eastern Mediterranean issues risks destabilising the long-standing refugee deal between Ankara and the EU. It could also weaken the EU position on Syria if, as has been mooted, some member states re-engage with Bashar al-Assad as a means of increasing pressure on Turkey, which maintains a military presence in northern Syria. More broadly, unless the pressure eases, this could further worsen Turkey's relationship with the US, NATO, and the EU more generally.

There is no doubt that the EU needs a more functional relationship with Turkey to protect its core interests in migration, energy, and the Middle East. The EU should now adopt a different approach – one that recognises the need for more constructive engagement with Turkey, and that highlights their shared interests in trade, energy, and regional security. This does not have to involve a miraculous resolution of the Cyprus conflict – or, at the other end of the scale, a move towards the two-state solution supported by hawks in Turkey and Turkish Cypriots. But it might involve the recognition of some Turkish claims around the rights of Turkish Cypriots to the region's energy spoils. And it should certainly include a rejection of active European participation in the destabilising regional conflict between Ankara and Abu Dhabi. The EU needs to carefully advance the following confidence-building steps that are in sync with core EU principles.

Cyprus

The highly contested, internationalised, and multilayered nature of problems in the eastern Mediterranean makes it impossible to address all sources of tension in one go. Instead, the EU should view the Cyprus conflict as the symbolic heart of the crisis and as a potential way to advance wider de-escalatory measures. While holding firm to its core principles, the EU should explore avenues for addressing technical issues related to gas exploitation. These are easier to engage with and resolve than more ideologically charged political questions around a final resolution of the conflict or maritime law. Besides allowing for meaningful headway on important issues, this approach would build much-needed confidence between the parties.

Firstly, European states should push the Cyprus and Turkish Cypriots towards technical-level discussions, with the goal of ensuring that all Cypriots can benefit from the island's gas reserves – whether they live in the north or the south. Turkish Cypriots can be represented without needing to recognise the TRNC or legitimise the Turkish military presence on the island. As the EU and the UN already regard Turkish Cypriot leaders as interlocutors on intercommunal issues, they should bring them into discussions on hydrocarbons. This process could be underpinned by a moratorium on gas exploration in Cyprus's exclusive economic zone, while Turkey would need to pull its drilling ships and navy out of the area.

Bring Turkey into the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum

A wider agreement with Turkey would have to include Turkish access to the regional gas network, both in its current form and in future infrastructure developments. The current configuration of the EMGF as a conduit for political and security developments is aggravating regional tensions. For energy, security, and economic reasons, Europe and Turkey have similar imperatives to reach a deal with each other. The EU should propose Turkish access to the EMGF as an entry point to a wider deal. This would also help improve relations between Turkey and Egypt, and ease exploration and development tension between the EU and Turkey.

Linking up Libya

Enhanced European cooperation with Turkey on Libya is another necessary dimension of a more effective EU approach to the eastern Mediterranean. Turkey's deal with the Libyan government has angered much of Europe. But Europe's current response risks marginalising it in the region – and will only prolong the war in Libya, given Turkey's centrality to any resolution there.

Europeans need to adopt an approach that not only presses Turkey to take a seat at the negotiating table but also provides it with incentives to do so. Europe should simultaneously ask the same of Haftar's external backers, who in many ways bear greater responsibility than Turkey for the recent escalation in Libya.

The EU should use the assets of its recently deployed naval operation and the opening created by Tripoli's Turkish-backed military gains to press the UAE to agree to a ceasefire and meaningful political talks. Europe should express frustration with not only Ankara but also Abu Dhabi for its role in escalating the regional conflict. This step would help convince Turkey that the EU is not singling it out. A balanced European approach to Libya, including an impartial attempt to monitor arms-embargo violations, would help persuade Turkey that the southern Mediterranean is not turning into another arena to exclude Turkish influence.

Progress on wider maritime talks would also help advance this effort, given that Turkey's position in Libya is partly driven by concerns that other actors are looking to squeeze it out in the Mediterranean.

The EU can take steps to ease deepening eastern Mediterranean tensions in accordance with European interests. It should adopt a broad-based approach that recognises and seeks to reconcile the complex linkages that now criss-cross the eastern Mediterranean. The EU has the capacity to ensure that the accumulated benefit of a wider deal prevents backsliding elsewhere. Ultimately, a wider EU approach would aim to turn the current situation on its head, taking advantage of the highly interconnected nature of the issues and of shared interests to create a mutually acceptable stabilising track. The depth of the problems means that no single, all-encompassing bargain is possible. But Europeans could stitch together a patchwork of more self-contained deals as they work towards establishing a 'new bargain' with Turkey.

Given the potential for instability in the eastern Mediterranean to affect core EU interests – migration, counter-terrorism, energy security, sovereignty, and more – European states not directly involved in the overlapping conflicts should help improve the relationship with Turkey.

Countries such as Germany have highlighted how they could work to support the political process in Libya. Berlin has already provided a neutral forum for all states to try to agree on core principles. But so far it has failed, partly because of a lack of European consensus on broader eastern Mediterranean issues and relations with Turkey. This was demonstrated most recently by Turkey's recent pressure on Malta to withdraw its support from the EU's Mediterranean mission, Operation IRINI. As is so often the case, a lack of unity is fatally undermining Europe's attempts to become a relevant actor, and is creating further space for other actors beyond Turkey and the UAE – namely Russia – to fill the void.

09/11/2020

EU-Turkey: European Council extends Ankara sanctions as Turkish F-16 jet flies over Samos island

www.ekathimerini.com

Ankara continued to challenge Greece's sovereignty in the eastern Aegean Friday as a Turkish F-16 flew over the island of Samos while the Oruc Reis seismic survey vessel continued its activities in an area south of the island of Kastellorizo and east of Rhodes.

At the same time, however, the European Union maintained its pressure on Ankara regarding the research activities of the Turkish Petroleum Corporation in Cyprus' continental shelf. In particular, the European Council decided to extend the sanctions against persons or entities involved in Turkey's illegal activities in Cyprus' continental shelf for another year (until November 12, 2021).

According to the announcement of the European Council, the EU will maintain its ability to impose targeted restrictive measures on persons or entities responsible for or involved in unauthorized hydrocarbon drilling activities in the Eastern Mediterranean. The sanctions consist of a travel ban in the EU and freezing the assets of individuals and entities. Moreover, it is prohibited for EU individuals and entities to allocate funds to those on the sanction list. Currently, these sanctions have been imposed on two people. The sanctions framework was first introduced in October last year, following a decision by the European Council.

Meanwhile Friday, President Katerina Sakellariopoulou was briefed on the situation in the Eastern Mediterranean and the role of the armed forces by the chief of Hellenic National Defense General Staff (GEETHA), Konstantinos Floros.

Earlier, Floros participated in a session of the EU Military Committee, briefing his counterparts and High Representative Josep Borrell on the situation in the East Med.

09/11/2020

Turkey-Economy: Oxford Analytica: Turkish recovery needs new policy as well as people

dailybrief.oxan.com

Monday, November 9, 2020

Top economy policymaker goes after an enemy takes over the Central Bank, but real policy change will depend on Erdogan

The lira rose against the dollar this morning, after the new Central Bank governor, Naci Agbal, said all policy tools would be used to achieve price stability, the official Anadolu news agency reported. It has not reported Treasury and Finance Minister Berat Albayrak's announced resignation (by Instagram) yesterday, which seems already to have set the exchange rate on an upward track to TRY8.18:USD1, from TRY8.54:USD1 at Friday's close. Agbal, a former finance minister, had replaced Murat Uysal at the Central Bank the day before, after a lira plunge. It has lost about 30% against the dollar this year, amid monetary policy confusion: the Bank was tightening indirectly and raised its main interest rate in September, but left it unchanged in October. President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, echoed by his son-in-law Albayrak, has opposed using interest rates to tame inflation and steady the exchange rate. The

next rate-setting meeting is due on November 19.

Oxford Analytica's judgement

Erdogan has refused to accept resignations before, but Albayrak's use of Instagram, complaining of ill-health, makes that unlikely this time. His and Uysal's departures will achieve little unless Erdogan allows Agbal (whom Albayrak dislikes) and whoever replaces Albayrak to reassure investors with a more conventional economic policy.

09/11/2020

Greece: Hellenic Navy proposes purchase of US frigates

www.ekathimerini.com

As part of the wider defensive and strategic cooperation with the US, the Hellenic Navy has proposed the promotion of a transnational agreement for the purchase of American Multi-Mission Surface Combatant (MMSC) frigates in order to renew its fleet.

According to exclusive information obtained by Kathimerini, the proposal is fully aligned with the government's declared strategic goals, while it is also seen positively by the Americans, who want to expand their military-industrial footprint in Greece.

The proposed intergovernmental agreement has as its central proposal a package solution that includes the supply of four MMSC frigates, the upgrade of four MEKO-type frigates, intermediate solution ships and the participation of Greek shipyards in the development of the new American FFG(X) type frigate.

The plan essentially envisions the creation of a naval force by 2030, which if combined with the supply of MH-60R anti-submarine helicopters, will have a mainly American slant.

08/11/2020

Turkey-Greece: top diplomats exchange views on future talks

www.hurriyetdailynews.com

Turkish and Greek foreign ministers, Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu and Nikos Dendias, exchanged on Nov 8 views on how to continue the bilateral talks in the coming period amid continued tension in the eastern Mediterranean.

The Turkish Foreign Ministry informed the exchange but did not provide the details about the conversation between the two foreign ministers, according to the Demirören News Agency.

09/11/2020

Greece: Fishermen complain of Turkish intimidation

www.ekathimerini.com

Greek fishermen say territorial waters in the northern Aegean are constantly being violated by Turkish fishing boats which engage in bullying tactics to spread their nets over a wider area.

Fishermen in the North Aegean may not be experiencing the kind of Greek-Turkish tension seen in the south near Kastellorizo, but they have reportedly been on the receiving end of intimidation tactics for years.

According to the secretary general of the Fishermen's Association of the Municipality of Alexandroupoli, Panagiotis Karavatis, Turkish boats resort to threats "so that we leave the fishing grounds to make way for Turkish boats," especially east of Samothraki and Limnos.

"There have been direct threats that we were in Turkish territorial waters while we were in Greek or international ones, and fishermen have been arrested," he said, adding that the fishermen were released but their boats were looted.

06/11/2020

Turkey-Migration: Mediterranean and Land Border Crisis Response Plan 2020 - Turkey

reliefweb.int

Funding Required \$3,000,000

Target Beneficiaries 150,000

IOM Vision

With the EMED and Land Border routes through Turkey identified as the main route taken by migrants and refugees, IOM seeks to support the efforts of the Government of Turkey to ensure that migrants and refugees attempting to cross through Turkey receive

the humanitarian protection and assistance that they need.

Context Analysis

The Eastern Mediterranean route continues to surpass both the Western and Central Mediterranean routes as the main route taken by migrants and refugees travelling to Europe, as it has done since February 2019. Since the signing of the EU-Turkey Statement and closure of the 'Balkan Route', as of March 2016, refugees and migrants have attempted to reach Western Europe through alternative paths, including overseas crossings from Turkey to Greece. Although the closure of the 'Balkan Route' initially resulted in a reduction in land crossing attempts, there have been significant increases in both the land and sea border arrivals from Turkey to Greece. The Edirne province remains a popular transit point for both irregular migrants and refugees who wish to enter the EU. This is due to its strategic land border between Turkey and Greece which is partly demarcated by the Maritsa River and acts as a potential entry point into the EU. The same applies to the Aegean Sea crossing where migrants and refugees are departing from Izmir province to reach Greece. The Turkish Coast Guard (TCG) identified 60,544 individuals at Turkey's maritime boundaries in 2019 - an increase of more than 138 per cent compared to 2018 [1]. Meanwhile, approximately 62,445 refugees and migrants arrived by sea to Greece in 2019, an increase of 90 per cent from 2018 [2].

Additionally, according to the Directorate General of Migration Management (DGMM) Turkey identified 454,662 migrants and refugees on land across the country in 2019, an increase in 70 per cent compared to 2018. In 2019, arrivals to Greece from Turkey by land numbered approximately 8,941 [3]. An increase in crossings over sea and land has continued in 2020, particularly as a result of continued instability in the region, from countries such as Syria, Afghanistan, and Iran. The number of migrants crossing the Aegean Sea have also risen in the past year. IOM has provided humanitarian assistance to migrants and refugees since the onset of the crisis. In 2019, approximately 37,400 migrants and refugees rescued at sea and 2,400 migrants and refugees apprehended on land were provided with humanitarian aid by IOM, which is 61 per cent of all migrants and refugees intercepted/rescued by TCG and less than 1 per cent of those apprehended on land by Gendarmerie/Turkish National Police. Interviews with migrants and refugees by IOM's field teams note that the increase in numbers was caused by a number of factors. These factors include the new order concerning migrants and refugees who are not registered in Istanbul to relocate from the city, increased fines to businesses who employ unregistered migrants, rising rents and living costs, and difficulty in finding jobs. Following the announcement from the Government of Turkey on 28 February 2020 that north-western borders to the EU would be opened, IOM has observed tens of thousands of migrants and refugees present in the Edirne province and at many locations on the Aegean Sea with intention of crossing over to Greece. Migrants and refugees on the move from all parts of Turkey include both single men and families with young children, with many vulnerable individuals including pregnant women, disabled, and elderly.

IOM field teams have observed migrants and refugees sleeping outside exposed to winter weather with limited means to cover basic needs including food, water, clothing, and medical care. While UN, local authorities and NGOs have been providing basic supplies, existing provisions are limited, and urgent humanitarian assistance is needed to protect those lacking basic needs and exposed to dangerous winter weather conditions.

For all regional activities related to the Syria crisis, please see IOM's Syria Regional Refugee & Resilience Plan 2020.

[1] Turkish Coast Guard official irregular migration statistics in the Aegean Sea

[2] IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix arrivals to Europe figures

[3] DGMM official statistics of irregular migrants apprehended on land

09/11/2020

Turkey: Highlights from Turkish press commentaries 9 Nov 20

Commentaire de l'auteur

The following is a selection of highlights from Turkish commentaries published in the 9 November 2020 edition of Turkish newspapers and news websites available to BBC Monitoring.

Turkish finance minister's resignation

Cumhuriyet (secularist opposition): "Treasury and Finance Minister Berat Albayrak saying 'there are no issues with the economy' was criticised by Bulent Arinc, a member of the Presidential High Advisory Board. Arinc's venting on a local TV station, saying 'we all see the economic distress', was seen as a signal before a fundamental reshuffle in Ankara. According to the behind-the-scenes talk, President [Recep Tayyip] Erdogan was expected to make the 'son-in-law' redundant in order to reconstruct market confidence. And late last night, Albayrak's resignation hit social media." (Commentary by Aykut Kucukkaya)

Haberturk (mainstream news website): "If the issue was not about increasing interest rates... appointing a new Central Bank chair may be a signal flare for change [and] the first step in a series of changes in the economy management. Indeed, last night the resignation of Treasury and Finance Minister Berat Albayrak came through. As I penned this article, the reason for his resignation was still unknown. If it is approved by the president, the situation may require a different analysis." (Commentary by Abdurrahman Yildirim)

Yenicag (nationalist opposition): "Here it is important to acknowledge that the main problem is not Albayrak. Because Albayrak is not the architect of the anti-democratic practises that erode foreign investors' trust, irrational interest policies that explode the (exchange) rates, consumption instead of production, and promoting production of concrete instead of manufacturing. This incident (resignation), in fact, is the strongest indicator of exhaustion within the [ruling Justice and Development Party] AKP and the ending of the system." (Commentary by Evren Devrim Zelyut)

US presidential election

Sabah (pro-government): "They are so happy! The talk is that [Joe] Biden's win would create a 'domino effect' and Erdogan would [be] toppled just like [US President Donald] Trump. Since they are already at it, they should also topple [Russian President Vladimir] Putin. Who am [I] talking about? Our leftist pro-Americans." (Commentary by Engin Ardic)

Yeni Asya (conservative opposition): "We were astounded to see people who during the Istanbul mayoral election [in 2019] had said that 'if Istanbul falls, Jerusalem falls too', supporting a candidate [Trump] who recognised Jerusalem as Israel's capital. Moreover, is it possible not to be baffled by those who support... Trump, who supports the terror organisation in Syria and utters unmentionable words for Erdogan? Seriously, where does the love of some people for Trump come from?" (Commentary by Mehmet Kara)

Turkiye (pro-government): "There is a Turkey that tells the US and Russia to 'leave the region' in Syria. There is a Turkey that reverses the resignation by [Government of National Accord Prime Minister Fayez] al-Sarraj in Libya, saying, 'it's not time to resign'. There is a Turkey that transforms once closed Maras [Varosha] in Cyprus into a picnic field. There is a Turkey that provides political and military support to Azerbaijan, saying: 'March ahead, Karabagh is yours'. America sees this power and... Biden will act accordingly. Biden will... realise what [kind of] leader Erdogan is and what kind of will he has." (Commentary by Suleyman Ozisik)

07/11/2020

EU Delegation: EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN REPORT – NOVEMBER 6, 2020

- GMAIL_DELEGATION_SUBSCRIPTIONS_ECA_ASIA_AFRICA_MENA_EN

HIGHLIGHTS

The EU Council adopted a decision extending for one year, until 12 November 2021, the existing framework for restrictive measures in response to Turkey's unauthorised drilling activities in the Eastern Mediterranean. Currently two individuals are subject to sanctions, both directors of the Turkish Petroleum Corporation (TPAO).

A number of malignant rising trends in Europe erode the values represented by the EU, FM Mevlut Cavusoglu told his counterparts in the opening speech for the informal meeting of SEEEP. We do not find the separation of West Balkans and Turkey right, as it ignores the status of Turkey's EU accession, he added. France censoring a cartoon of its Education Minister Jean-Michel Blanquer is an example of "hypocrisy" and "double standard", Foreign minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said.

We are open to expand the framework of cooperation with all of our neighbours. With one caveat: that they respect the principles of good neighbourly relations and international law, said Greek FM Nicos Dendias.

A Turkish F-16 flew over the eastern coast of the island of Samos on Friday afternoon, the Greek media reported, citing Greek Army sources. Responding to the Greek Navy's claim that it detected Turkish submarines off the coast of Rhodes, security sources assessed "the submarine they claim to have detected, possibly their own submarines".

There is no need for the French frigate to stalk Turkish exploration vessels in the Eastern Mediterranean as it can easily keep track of the Turkish ships through mobile apps and internet websites, a security source said.

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