

EU's passivity towards Turkish aggression risks war in Europe

*With Covid and Brexit dominating the news, British readers may not be aware of a conflict brewing in the Eastern Mediterranean between Greece and Turkey. An increasingly aggressive Turkish foreign policy has seen Ankara send its naval forces into (contested) Greek and Cypriot waters. As former Greek ambassador **Leonidas Chrysanthopoulos** explains, the EU's passive approach to Turkey is not only permitting violations of the territorial integrity of two of its member states, it also risks leading to war in Europe.*

At the informal meeting of EU Foreign Ministers that took place in Berlin on 27-28 August, it was decided to submit proposals for sanctions against Turkey to be discussed at the European Council of 24-25 September, if there is no progress by then. According to remarks made by the High Representative Joseph Borrel, it was decided 'to add individuals suggested by Cyprus to the list of the existing regime for illegal drillings in the Eastern Mediterranean with a view to a rapid adoption.'

When asked to clarify what other sanctions were being discussed, Borrel gave a feeble response:

'First you know, that we are listing persons. We can move to list assets-ships. We can move to sanction the participation in the activities that we consider illegal, meaning everything related to the work on this kind of activities, meaning prohibiting the use of European ports, European capacities, technology and supplies. We can also look at the finance needed for this kind of illegal

activities. Everything related to the problem itself. And we can go to measures related to sectoral activities, in the fields in which the Turkish economy is more interrelated with the European economy. This is what we can do. But in general terms, the important thing is to focus on everything related to the activities that we consider illegal. For the time being we list only the persons.'

This is the reply of the EU to a third country that is violating the territorial integrity of two EU member states!

Greece must insist on a robust EU response

Borrel's feeble reply has given Turkey the courage to continue its illegal activities on the continental shelves of two member states. The Turkish Foreign Minister announced on 29 August that the Turkish survey vessel *Oruc Reis* will continue its exploratory activities for another three months, thus totally ignoring the EU. There is therefore no reason to wait until 24 September when the European Council will examine relations between the EU and Turkey.

Greece should ask for an extraordinary meeting of the EU Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs for the immediate adoption of effective sanctions against Turkey. These sanctions should include those mentioned by Borrel, but Greece and Cyprus should also insist on the following three measures:

1. The removal of the status of a candidate country from Turkey
2. Suspension of the Customs Union with Turkey
3. Prohibition of exports or imports of arms of any kind with Turkey. (This is a sanction that has been imposed on Russia by the EU.)

It should be underlined that the European Council of June 2019 instructed the European Commission to prepare targeted

sanctions against Turkey for violating the territorial integrity of the Republic of Cyprus. Only after seven months was it decided to impose sanctions on the CEO of TPAO (Turkish Petroleum Company) and one of its directors.

By contrast, a similar list of sanctions against Russia contains 175 people and 44 entities – for so-called violations that do not even concern any member states of the EU. The list against Russia will be reviewed again on 15 September – and Greece and Cyprus should take advantage of this to demonstrate the EU's double-standards.

The future of the EU in the balance

We all know that that the EU will not voluntarily adopt strong sanctions against Turkey. This is why, if the Greek Government wants to manage the issue within the EU framework, it should raise the alarm that the incapability of the EU to protect the territorial integrity of its members against a third country could lead to its dissolution. The inability of the EU to adopt effective sanctions against Turkey will inevitably start discussions in Greece about a possible Grexit.

When Argentina invaded the Falkland Islands in April 1981, the then EEC adopted serious sanctions against Buenos Aires: measures that included export and import bans of not only arms but all products. Berlin, which holds the EU presidency until the end of the year, must be reminded that it cannot continue selling arms to a third country that is violating the territorial integrity of two EU members. If Germany continues to do so, then it is also undermining the unity of the EU.

How can the EU have any future if it is not even prepared to try and protect the territorial integrity of its members? Yet the majority of EU member states are willing to give Turkey yet another chance until 24 September to change its policies *vis-à-vis* Greece, something that is very unlikely to happen

given that it continues its hostile acts and Erdogan has not stopped insulting Greece. European Council President Charles Michel is floating around the idea of holding an international conference that would also include the parties concerned, but it is well known that Turkey would not accept the Republic of Cyprus, which it does not recognise.

In order to achieve the adoption of effective sanctions against Turkey, Greece must start playing hardball within the EU. It must create problems with sanctions against Belarus, and with the review of the list of sanctions against persons in Russia and the Ukraine scheduled for 15 September. Greece must insist as a matter of principle that the EU cannot adopt lighter sanctions against Turkey – a country that is violating the territorial integrity of two member states – than against Russia, which is not violating the territorial integrity of any EU member.

War in Europe on the horizon?

Erdogan has trapped himself badly: the Turkish economy continues to collapse, and the only solution for him is war against Greece. And he does not hide it. He cannot go back without losing face.

Greece and Cyprus must be prepared to face Turkey alone. While we hope that our fellow EU member states will recover their principles and help us to effectively face the provocations of Turkey, it is clear that we cannot count on this.

In concluding, allow me to quote from the *Courier* of 13 November 1827 a report of the French newspaper *Le Constitutionnel* dated 9 November, that shows how little has changed since then:

‘The Turks do not keep amongst us any agent, any functionary, any representative; their arrogance increases

with our humility and with our compliances – they permit only the language of submission... Up to the present time, we have confined ourselves to vain and timid protestations, which have had no other effect than to increase the barbarities of the external enemies...'

In effect this could be a message from the Europeans of 1827 to the EU of 2020. But is anyone listening?