



SEMAPHORE

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Plans to Extend Territorial Waters Create New Greece-Turkey Waves

Friction has arisen between Greece and Turkey over the decision of the former to extend the western limit of its territorial waters in the Ionian Sea to 12 nautical miles from the current six.

The announcement of the plan by Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis follows the signing of agreement with Italy on maritime boundaries in June. This established an exclusive economic zone and resolved long-standing issues over fishing rights in the Ionian Sea, on which Italy also has a boundary.

Albania, which additionally has an Ionian coast, has been officially informed about Greece's plans, and Prime Minister Mitsotakis has said talks will be held on a maritime agreement with Albania.

Greece has also pursued a similar agreement with Egypt, which has angered its neighbour Turkey. The Turks believe such an agreement infringes on its continental shelf.

In an August interview Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu boldly stated: "[Greece's] extending territorial waters to 12 miles in the Ionian Sea is not our concern. But they cannot do it in the Aegean. A decision taken by our Parliament years ago is valid today. It's a cause of a war."

Tensions between Greece and Turkey are centuries-old and the two countries are currently in dispute over the extent of their continental shelves and maritime boundaries. The row escalated after Turkey recently sent a survey vessel into disputed eastern Mediterranean waters accompanied by naval forces, a move Athens deemed illegal.

Turkey appears serious in its warning that any move by Athens to extend its territorial waters in disputed areas would be a "casus belli", or cause for war. The two countries are NATO allies but a decision taken by the Turkish Parliament in 1995 warned Greece that any attempt to extend its territorial waters to 12 miles would be considered "casus belli."

Greece claims it has the right to extend its territorial waters to 12 miles in line with the 1982-dated United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. Turkey is not a party to the convention.

Other countries have become involved in the dispute. France has supported Greece and Russia has also noted the sovereign right of states to territorial waters of up to 12 nautical miles.

Announced Russia: "Russia's position as a permanent member of the UN Security Council is the starting point. We consider the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea the 'cornerstone' of international maritime agreements."

The United States has said the two countries must commit to dialogue.

Further Reading

In the course of research for this reportage, *Semaphore* came across the journal *Ocean Development & International Law* Volume 36, 2005 – Issue 1, featuring an article from Jon M Van Dyke entitled "An Analysis of the Aegean Disputes under International Law".

It details how Greece and Turkey have been unable to resolve interrelated disputes in the Aegean Sea involving the breadth of the territorial sea, the delimitation of the continental shelf, the demilitarisation of certain islands, and the passage rights of ships and planes. The article examines the historical background of these disputes and offers recommendations for possible solutions.

For interested readers, the download citation is accessible [here](#).

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