

TURKEY - GREECE - THE AEGEAN QUESTION*

Statement by the Turkish Foreign Ministry on the Aegean Question on 8 April, 1987:

The recent crisis in the Aegean has highlighted the importance of this Sea for the two coastal states. The dispute is not limited to the problems like the Continental Shelf or the airspace. The issue at hand is one of maintaining an equilibrium between the rights and interests of the two sides as an inter-related and integrated whole. The last crisis has once again underlined the necessity of bringing about equitable solutions which would reconcile in a balanced way the rights and interests of the two coastal states.

In the past, whenever the two countries were able to establish such a balance in the Aegean, they succeeded, in an exemplary manner, to develop their bilateral relations, and co-operation. Turkey stands ready today to act in the same direction.

The recent crisis in the Aegean originated from the Continental Shelf dispute. The point which should be well understood by all concerned, is that the Continental Shelf constitutes one of the basic elements of Turkish-Greek equilibrium in the Aegean. Because, an agreement on the Continental Shelf in the Aegean which has unique geographical features not to be seen anywhere else in the world, will directly affect the rights and interests of the two coastal states in several fields like security, economy and navigation. Therefore, the problem is basically a political one which can only be resolved through bilateral negotiations. In fact, taking into account the particularities in the Aegean, the United Nations Security Council called for the settlement of the problem through bilateral negotiations. Turkey and Greece as well agreed on the same principle and registered their accord in this respect by the Bern Agreement.

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*[The text of this statement was provided by the Turkish Embassy, Canberra]

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Most of the delimitation agreements in various regions of the world were also arrived at by direct negotiations among the states concerned. The number of Continental Shelf disputes referred to international judicial means are limited to a few cases. Bilateral negotiations which is the common practice in the world, is particularly relevant for the Aegean Continental Shelf for reasons mentioned above.

Pending an agreement on the Continental Shelf, it is not clear which parts of the Aegean are Turkish and which is Greek. Those who regard 97percent of the Aegean as Greek Continental Shelf take purely arbitrary position. It is an interesting contradiction that these arbitrary claims can be made by the very people who continuously refer to international law. Turkey has never undertaken any unilateral action or engaged in provocations, but was compelled to take measures in response to Greek actions in order to protect her basic rights and interests. It should be recalled that the Aegean Continental Shelf problem emerged by the issuance of unilateral Greek licenses in the disputed area in 1969. The recent crisis was also the outcome of unilateral Greek actions in the disputed area since 1984, in violation of Bern Agreement.

Direct negotiations are the basic element of the Bern Agreement. Greece, which has disrupted the negotiations in 1981, can not then use it as a pretext to challenge the validity of the Bern Agreement itself. Moreover, the recent crisis clearly demonstrated that the stipulation of the Bern Agreement barring any unilateral activity in the disputed area, constitutes a political requirement, pending a settlement.

The tensions in the Aegean were recently aggravated by the decision of Greece to extend its unilateral actions in various parts of the Aegean since 1984, to the disputed area east of Thassos. The firm decision of the Greek Government to proceed with the planned drilling east of Thassos after the acquisition of the majority shares of the consortium was formally communicated to the Turkish Ambassador in Athens. It was upon this communication that Turkey felt the need to adopt measures to protect her rights and interests in the Aegean.

Those who claim that 95 percent of the license areas issued by Turkey lie within Greek Continental Shelf should not forget that Turkish rights and claims are at least as valid as those of Greece. The uncompromising and provocative party to the dispute becomes evident by such statements and claims. It is not possible to arrive at equitable solutions that would reconcile the basic rights and interests of the two coastal states by claims which reflect a mentality that regards the entire Aegean as Greek.

Undoubtedly Turkish-Greek problems in the Aegean are not confined to the Continental Shelf dispute. The illegal militarization of the Aegean Islands, the maritime and aviation problems are the outcomes of unilateral and arbitrary actions. Turkey can never accept the *fait accompli* and arbitrary actions that disrupts the equilibrium of rights and interests in the Aegean. Taking all these into consideration, we state that various Turkish-Greek problems in the Aegean necessitate a comprehensive dialogue between the two countries. Prime Minister Ozal himself has called for such a dialogue repeatedly, most recently in London, underlining that he had extended an olive branch as a symbol of the peaceful policy he pursues and believes in. It is worth pondering on the improvement of Turkish-Greek relations in view of the fact that Greece can still talk about a referral to the International Court of Justice after the recent Aegean crisis, notwithstanding the Turkish calls for a dialogue.

Hostility in our bilateral relations has never originated from Turkey. The incredible Greek statements in connection with the Turkish application for full membership to the European Community that were made even at a time when the two countries are engaged in a search for a dialogue after the recent crisis, do not help the efforts to ameliorate the situation.

The recent crisis has provided a historic opportunity for the two countries to resolve their bilateral disputes. It is high time for the statesman of both sides to demonstrate constructive political will, conscious of their historical responsibility, rather than adopting narrow, short-lived and prejudiced approaches. If we could launch an effort based on such an understanding, the Turkish and Greek nations would be the foremost beneficiaries of such an undertaking we believe that such an historic opportunity should not be missed.