

## RESOLUTION: TOWARDS A COMMON EUROPEAN POLICY IN THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN

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The current increase in the instability in the Eastern Mediterranean has demonstrated once more the need for more targeted European Union policies for the region and the need for a stronger and more coherent European action.

Since March 2020, the difficult situation at the Greek-Turkish land border saw migrants used as tools in a geopolitical crisis. The European Union (EU) tried, with a visit of the Presidents of the three institutions, to deliver a message of European solidarity and emphasise that this is not a Greek-Turkish bilateral problem but a European one: European Parliament President David Sassoli stressed that what was happening in March 2020 showed the need for “a Common European Migration policy” and EU Commission President Ursula Von Der Leyen underlined that this was “not only a Greek border but also a European one”. From the migration perspective, the “Evros Crisis” created a regrettable precedent as Greece unilaterally decided to suspend for a month the possibility to submit an asylum application.

Despite these messages reinforcing European solidarity, the summer of 2020 was characterised by a crisis in the Eastern Mediterranean over maritime boundaries with the enhanced risk of military escalation. Ignited by the discovery of very rich gas deposits in the Eastern Mediterranean, a new exploitation race began between the countries of the region and increased the tendency to reopen frozen maritime border disputes. Turkey continues to consider that islands only have a restricted right to generate Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) and Continental Shelves while Greece favours a broader interpretation of the rights of islands, based on the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). The Turkish interpretation, enshrined in its November 2019 MoU with Libya, drew criticism from Greece, Cyprus as well as the EU, which added it went against the sovereign rights of Member-States and against international law. It is worth pointing out that the EU has signed and ratified UNCLOS as a full party and the Convention has now become part of the EU acquis. In line with this, the Commission, in its 2020 Communication on EU Enlargement, regarding Turkey, stressed the potential benefits of a Turkish ratification to UNCLOS, for issues like fisheries, where the EU has exclusive competences.

In the meanwhile, older conflicts in the region continue to fester. The situation in Cyprus, 17 years after its accession to the Union, still faces significant challenges on the path towards a lasting solution on the basis of a Bi-Zonal, Bi-Communal Federation, with political equality, despite the pronounced desire by UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres to resolve it. In the aftermath of the deadlock at the 2017 Crans-Montana Conference, it is particularly troubling that for the first time both the Turkish and the Turkish-Cypriot community leadership openly advocate the two-state solution, as the basis for any future negotiations. The civil war in Libya has stopped following the signing of a ceasefire in October 2020 and the formation of an interim government of national unity but the peace is fragile. Lebanon is still prone to deep societal divisions and a malfunctioning political system which have been exacerbated by an economic crisis and chaos following the explosion at the port of Beirut in August 2020. In May 2021,

violence in Israel and Palestine resurfaced in East Jerusalem, leading to upwards of 200 deaths and pointed to the responsibility of all leaders to act against extremists,

These ongoing conflicts continue to cause instability in the region and lead to the emergence of security threats for the European Union and an increased risk for a new phase of significant migration pressures.

More broadly, the Mediterranean region is also endowed with abundant renewable energy sources, which can serve its peoples and the broader region while protecting the climate and the environment. It is beyond any ecological or even economic or financial logic to invest further in the extraction of fossil fuels, oil or gas, as we move towards a shared carbon-neutral future in the decades ahead. The new Agenda for the Mediterranean put forward by the European Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy in February 2021 identifies the “Green transition: climate resilience, energy, and environment” as one of five key policy areas around which cooperation between the EU and the countries of the region will revolve. Tensions about the ownership and potential extraction of fossil fuel deposits make now even less sense in the Mediterranean region, which should be united in protecting its biodiversity and environmental conditions, while prospering sustainably in the spirit and practice of an extended European Green Deal.

To address these challenges, the European Council has been repeatedly involved in the management of the Eastern Mediterranean crises. In the conclusions of the meetings of October and December 2020, it reaffirmed full solidarity with Greece and Cyprus in the face of Turkish provocative actions while stressing the use of any legal instruments at its disposal in the event of renewed international law violations from Turkey. The Council also added the need for the development of a positive agenda with Turkey and proposed in the Council Conclusions of 1 and 2 October 2020, a Multilateral Conference on the Eastern Mediterranean to discuss the many issues faced in the region, from maritime boundary delimitations to migration and economic cooperation and include all relevant parties.

In light of the progress made by Greece and Turkey since the restart of the exploratory talks in January 2021, the European Council, while stressing the fragility of the process, re-iterated in the Statement of the Members of the European Council of March 2021, the need to continue to engage with Turkey on these sensitive issues.

The European Parliament adopted Resolution 2020/2774 RSP in September 2020 expressing its solidarity with Greece and Cyprus while condemning the Turkish moves in the Eastern Mediterranean. It passed the subsequent Resolution 2020/2844 RSP in November 2020 condemning the Turkish illegal actions in the city of Varosha and called for the resumption of diplomacy and dialogue for the resolution of the Cypriot conflict. In a new Resolution, adopted in May 2021, the European Parliament re-affirmed Turkey’s important role as a partner in the correct management of the migration crisis but also called on the Turkish government to respect the rule of law and fundamental rights and avoid the democratic backslide observed in the recent years. The European Parliament also expressed its deep concern about

Turkey's unprecedented illegal behaviour in the Eastern Mediterranean, which violates both the sovereignty and the sovereign rights of EU Member States and international law and by the related security and stability risks. It stressed that a sustainable conflict resolution can only be found through dialogue, diplomacy and negotiations in a spirit of goodwill and in line with international law.

The relevance of the aforementioned new Agenda for the Mediterranean should not be discounted as it aims to both stimulate an environmentally friendly economic recovery and development plan while at the same time, address fundamental rights, rule of law, and migration challenges. For the Eastern Mediterranean specifically, the new Agenda also proposed a peaceful dialogue on the basis of international law and reintegrated the EU's support for the organisation of a Multilateral Conference to address the issues faced in the region.

However, these successive announcements and declarations do not constitute a comprehensive policy to solve the problems in the region. In fact, this critical situation showed once again the necessity of a strong and unified European position for the Mediterranean and more coherence in dealing with challenges from neighbouring countries and their unilateral actions in an area of strategic importance for the EU and relevance for the peace and stability of the entire Mediterranean and Middle East regions. The EU should develop a comprehensive, unified and coherent strategy in Eastern Mediterranean, engaging the neighbouring countries in a constructive dialogue at all levels, including governments, national parliaments and civil society.

Hence, the successive regional crises in the Eastern Mediterranean affect the European citizens' perception of the European Union as capable of helping in the resolution of conflicts in its neighbourhood, based on international law and European values. This influences their view of the Union as being able to provide security, stability and prosperity for its citizens as well as promoting regional development and cooperation with its neighbours. The current unstable environment has repercussions on the security of European citizens and generates additional challenges like a renewal of migratory pressures as well as new environmental ones. These situations have been and will be exploited in elections throughout Europe by anti-European and nationalist political forces, as well as malign exogenous powers, which in turn seek to weaken the European construction.

The Conference on the Future of Europe, which started on the 9th of May, presents a unique opportunity to discuss with the citizens the complexity of the situation, the need for a united common approach and the pressing need to develop a holistic and sustainable European policy in the Eastern Mediterranean.

In this context, and keeping in mind the previous UEF statement of September 2020 concerning a European solution to the problems in the Eastern Mediterranean,

The UEF:

1. Requests from the co-Presidents of the Conference to take the initiative to establish a High level Wise Persons Committee, composed of prestigious European personalities with the requisite experience and knowhow, taking very much into account the views of the civil society, think tanks and the academia. The Committee would seek to propose a strategy for EU action in the Eastern Mediterranean as well as a new EU strategy for Turkey and submit a report with options as to how to implement them;
2. Supports the initiative concerning a Multilateral Conference on the Eastern Mediterranean and urges the Council and the European Parliament to start the preparatory work in view of setting the Conference's agenda. The voice of civil society has to be heard in this Conference;
3. Calls on the European Commission to present a legal analysis on the Union's competences regarding the issues of maritime law, some of which are of exclusive EU competence and covered by EU law, such as in the area of common fisheries policy;
4. Invites the Commission to develop a Green Deal for the Eastern Mediterranean in the framework of the EU Green Deal given the multitude of climate change and environmental degradation concerns in the region which require joint action among the region's stakeholders based on the principle of co-ownership and clear just transition mechanisms for third countries.