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"Essentially, the subject is always between 2 points"

Weekly Political and Geopolitical Developments

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51. YILINDA KIBRIS BARIŞ HAREKÂTI: HISTORICAL PROCESS AND CURRENT SITUATION IN THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN

The Process Leading to the Cyprus Peace Operation (1950s-1974)

Common Republic of Cyprus and Conflicts: In the 1960 Republic of Cyprus, which was established with the 1959 Zurich and London Treaties, the Turkish and Greek communities had the status of equal founding partners. However, the Greek Cypriots **did not give up on the goal of connecting the island to Greece (Enosis)**.¹ In 1963, in an attempt to unilaterally amend the constitution of the Republic, they excluded the Turks from the joint administration; This de facto marked the end of the common state. Then the paramilitary EOKA organization and the Greek Cypriot militia **launched systematic attacks on the Turkish community**. In the "Bloody Christmas" events **that started on December 21, 1963**², hundreds of Turkish Cypriots were killed, more than 100 Turkish villages were evacuated, and thousands of people emigrated. In 1964, Turkey had to protect the besieged Turkish insurgents in Erenköy with a limited air campaign; **martyrdom** of Pilot Lt. Genghiz Topel³ in these clashes. It had a profound impact in Turkey.

Turkey's Intervention Efforts: Turkey, which considered the option of intervening in the island in 1964 in accordance with the Treaty of Guarantee, was met with a threatening letter from the then US President Johnson⁴ (**Johnson Letter**, 5 June 1964). The U.S. wanted to deter Turkey from a possible Cyprus operation in the midst of the Cold War, when there was tension with the Soviets. During this period, **the USA and Western European countries**, under the name of preserving the status quo in Cyprus, actually stayed close to the Greek-Greek theses; The Turkish side's concerns for life safety remained in the background.

1974 Coup and Enosis Threat: On July 15, 1974, a coup d'état led by Nikos Sampson with the support of the junta in Greece overthrew President Makarios and took a step towards Enosis by declaring the "*Hellenic Republic of Cyprus*". This put the Turkish presence on the island in direct danger of extinction. Guarantor Turkey decided to act alone. **The U.S. administration, on the other hand, tried to stop Turkey:** At a high-level meeting in Washington on July 16, 1974, U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger opposed Turkey's intervention, saying, "We need to keep the Turks out of this business." The U.S. even discussed the possibility of sending its own troops to Cyprus after the coup; The aim was to take control of the situation by bypassing Turkey. However, Ankara was determined to use its right of guarantee to avoid the risk of massacres on the island.

July 20, 1974: Operation Peace and International Reactions

First Phase Operation (20 July): On the morning of 20 July, the Turkish Armed Forces *launched the Cyprus Peace Operation with the motto "Let Ayşe go on vacation"*. While the landing ships were transferred to the coast of Kyrenia, the airborne troops landed near Nicosia. Turkey announced the purpose of the operation to the world public opinion as *"to bring peace to the islanders and to establish peace for both the Turkish and Greek people"*. In the first days, Turkish forces managed to establish a bridgehead on the Kyrenia-Nicosia line. The UN Security Council called for a ceasefire in Resolution 353. By the time a ceasefire was reached on July 22, the Turkish army had held on to the landing zone and reached the Turkish zone in Nicosia, **preventing the extermination of the Turkish population**.

Geneva Talks and Second Phase (14 August): On 25 July 1974, the guarantors Turkey, Greece and the United Kingdom and the Turkish/Greek Cypriot leadership sat at the table in Geneva. Greece and the Greek Cypriot administration did not agree to solutions that would expand the autonomy of the Turks. In the meantime, even during the ceasefire process, the attacks of the Greek Cypriot militias against the Turks continued in some regions, and when diplomacy did not yield results, Turkey **launched a second operation** on August 14. In the second phase, Turkish troops took control of about 37% of the island, including Famagusta, Lefke, and parts of Nicosia, within three days. On August 16, a unilateral ceasefire was declared. **As a result, the Enosis attempt was thwarted, and the de facto two-part structure of the island emerged.**

¹ Enosis is a historical-political ideal that is at the center of the Cyprus problem, undermines trust between the two peoples on the island and dynamites the efforts for a solution. For the Turkish side, Enosis is not only an ideology of the past, but also the mental background of today's deadlock.

² Bloody Christmas is not only a massacre, but also a flagrant violation of the status guaranteed by international treaties and an attempt at systematic annihilation of the Turkish Cypriot people. For this reason, Turkey's Peace Operation in 1974 was considered not only as a military but also as a humanitarian necessity. Every year, December 21 is commemorated as the "National Struggle and Martyrs' Commemoration Day" in the TRNC and Turkey. There are martyrdoms and monuments in the areas where the events took place.

³ According to the international law of war, a captured soldier should be treated humanely, but Cengiz Topel was severely tortured. His nails were ripped out, his ribs were broken, traces of cigarette butts were found on his body. A short time later, he was killed and taken to the Greek Hospital in Nicosia.

⁴ The main wording of Johnson's letter was clear and unambiguous in diplomatic courtesies: 1. You cannot intervene in Cyprus with US weapons: US-supplied weapons cannot be used in Cyprus." 2. You will be excluded from NATO protection in the event of an intervention: "The United States cannot guarantee the application of NATO obligations to Turkey if the Soviet Union retaliates." 3. Unilateral military action is unacceptable without the consent of the United States: "Military actions that threaten stability in the region should not be taken without the consent of the United States." The Johnson Letter did not directly prevent the intervention in Cyprus, but it was decisive in Turkey's orientation towards a more cautious line against the Western alliance. The effects of this letter on the diplomatic preparation of the 1974 Peace Operation and the increasing importance Turkey attaches to the defense industry have been profound and lasting.

The Attitude of the USA and Europe (1974): While the operation led to the collapse of the military junta regime in Greece, reactions to Turkey rose in the Western world. U.S. Secretary of State Kissinger criticized the second operation as a territorial gain. As a result of Greece's intense lobbying activities, the U.S. Congress **decided to impose** an arms embargo on Turkey in February 1975. This embargo remained in effect until 1978 and created tension in Turkish-American relations. A similar attitude prevailed in Western Europe; for example, although the United Kingdom and other NATO allies remained officially neutral, discourses describing Turkey as an "occupier" in Cyprus were widespread. **In 1974, the United Nations Security Council** adopted resolutions 353 and 360 demanding the withdrawal of foreign military forces and the restoration of the territorial integrity of Cyprus. In the following years, even if the UN General Assembly and Security Council resolutions did not condemn the Turkish operation, the *"occupied territories"* were emphasized and calls for Turkey to withdraw were repeated.

Perspective of Turkey and the Turkish Cypriots: Turkey argued that intervention was **a legitimate right stemming from the 1960 Treaty of Guarantee**, and with this operation, the repetition of the massacres of the 1960s was prevented, the annexation of the island to Greece was prevented and the existence of the Turkish Cypriot people was guaranteed. As a matter of fact, in the post-1974 period, a long-term peace environment could be achieved by establishing life security on the island. The Turkish Cypriot community and Turkey refer to the operation as a *"liberation"* and *"peace"* operation.

After the Operation: The Formation of Northern Cyprus and the Political Process (1974-2004)

Population Exchange and De facto Division: After the 1974 ceasefire, the geographical division of the island was consolidated. As a result of the Vienna talks in 1975, the de facto bi-zonal situation was agreed on a humanitarian basis; **The Turks moved to the north and the Greeks to the south.** After this population exchange, the Turkish Federated State of Cyprus was declared on February 13, 1975. The Turkish side initially **stated that it was open to seeking a federal solution, but the Greek Cypriot administration did not want to recognize the constituent political equality of the Turks.** **In the 1977 and 1979 Summit Agreements, the leaders of the two communities (Denktash-Makarios and Denktash-Kyprianou)⁵ ⁶⁷** drew up frameworks that accepted the principle of a *bi-zonal, bi-communal federation*. However, this consensus could not be fully reflected in the negotiations in practice.

Proclamation of the TRNC (1983) and International Reaction: The Turkish Cypriot side declared the independence of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) **on 15 November 1983 on the grounds that the Greek Cypriot side continued to be recognized alone as the "Republic of Cyprus" in the international arena and its intransigent attitude in the federation negotiations.** The UN Security Council condemned the proclamation of the TRNC with resolutions 541 (1983) and 550 (1984) and demanded its withdrawal and called on other states not to recognize the TRNC. As a result of these decisions, the Cyprus issue **has settled on an international basis in which the Greek Cypriot leadership is addressed as the "recognized Cypriot government"** and the Turkish side is politically excluded. **Turkey and the TRNC criticized this stance,** stating that the intransigence of the Greek Cypriot side was rewarded and the Turkish side was subjected to unfair isolation.

United Nations Settlement Plans: Throughout the 1980s and 90s, UN goodwill missions repeatedly negotiated a solution. In particular, UN Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali's *"Series of Ideas"* in 1992 and attempts at rapprochement at the end of the 1990s were inconclusive. **The 2004 Annan Plan⁸** was the most comprehensive

⁵ Rauf Denktash (1924–2012) was the political leader of the Turkish Cypriot people, a lawyer and the founding president of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC). Denktash, who has been active in politics since the 1950s in order to defend the rights of the Turkish Cypriots, took part in the establishment of the Turkish Resistance Organization (TMT) in 1958 and became one of the leaders of the Turkish community in the constitutional structure of the Republic of Cyprus in 1960. He came to the fore as the spokesperson of the Turkish community in the conflicts that started on the island after 1963, and became the first president of the Turkish Federated State of Cyprus, which was established in 1975, and the TRNC, which was declared in 1983. Throughout his life, Denktash defended the political equality, sovereignty and close relations of the Turkish Cypriots with Turkey, and was the main defender of the Turkish theses in the intensive negotiation processes in the international arena. With his diplomatic acumen, determination and oratorical power, he left his mark on Turkish political history.

⁶ Makarios III (1913–1977) was Archbishop of the Greek Orthodox Church of Cyprus and the first President of the Republic of Cyprus. A figure both religious and political, Makarios was one of the strongest proponents of the ideology of Enosis (the annexation of the island to Greece). After being elected Archbishop in 1950, he fought against the British administration in line with the goal of Enosis and paved the way for the establishment of the EOKA organization. In 1960, he became president of the Republic of Cyprus, which was established by the partnership of the Turkish and Greek communities, but he soon pushed the Turkish side out of the system with his attempts to change the constitutional order. The political responsibility for the events of Bloody Christmas, which began in 1963, and the collapse of the 1960 partnership state, rests largely with Makarios. Although he was deposed in 1974 by a junta-backed coup in Greece, he later returned to power. Makarios left his mark on the history of Cyprus as the symbol of Greek ultra-nationalism, but he was also the architect of policies that deepened the gap between the two communities on the island.

⁷ Kyprianou served as the first foreign minister of the Republic of Cyprus, which was established in 1960, and was among Makarios' close advisers. Upon Makarios' death in 1977, Kyprianou assumed the constitutional presidency and held this position for three terms. During his tenure, he carried out a harsh diplomacy describing the Turkish Cypriot side and Turkey as "occupiers" and tried to strengthen the Greek Cypriot theses in the international public opinion. Although the Doruk Agreement signed with Denktash in 1979 included the principle of a bi-communal and bi-zonal federal solution, it was criticized for not adhering to these principles in the following period. Kyprianou is remembered as an anti-solution and intransigent figure.

⁸ The fact that approximately 7% of the TRNC lands were given to the Greek Cypriots and the return of strategic regions such as Güzelyurt and Maraş created concerns about regional losses among the Turkish people. Property Confusion: The plan contained uncertainties about the restitution or compensation of Turkish properties that have been on it since 1974. This situation has created legal insecurity for Turkish Cypriots living in the North and foreigners who have bought property. Sovereignty Question: Although the plan included the definition of "two constituent states", it did not envisage full sovereignty for the Turkish Cypriot people, but limited administrative autonomy. The Turkish side argued that the plan did not adequately guarantee the principle of "equal partnership". Inequality in International Status: Although the plan failed, the Greek Cypriot side was rewarded with full membership in the EU, while the Turkish side, which said "yes", was left alone with international isolation. This situation gave rise to the idea in the Turkish public that "the party that acts in good faith is punished". Despite the rejection of the plan, only the Greek Cypriot side was rewarded with EU membership, which created a deep crisis of confidence on the Turkish side, and this event was one of the main factors in the weakening of faith in the idea of a federal solution.

initiative of this process: the UN-prepared plan for federative reunification was put to a referendum on the island. On 24 April 2004, **the Turkish Cypriot people** accepted the Annan Plan with 65% of the votes, but the **Greek Cypriot people rejected it with 76% of the votes**. Thus, the merger did not take place. Despite the failure of the plan, a week later (May 1, 2004), the Greek Cypriot side **was made a full member of the European Union, representing the entire island**. Turkey and the TRNC harshly criticized the EU's decision to reward the Greek Cypriots. As a matter of fact, although the EU promised to lift the isolation on Northern Cyprus, the isolation of the Turkish side continued due to the Greek Cypriot veto.

ECtHR Decisions and the Property Question: The property rights of the Greek Cypriots who were displaced after 1974 became a critical subject of dispute in the field of international law. **In the 1990s, the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR)** made important decisions in the lawsuits filed by Greek Cypriots against Turkey. In the case of *Loizidou v. Turkey*, the ECtHR concluded **that Turkey has de facto control in the north, taking into account the lack of international recognition of the TRNC**; He held Turkey responsible for denying Loizidou access to his properties in Kyrenia and awarded compensation. Similarly, in *Cyprus v. Turkey* (2001), the ECtHR held Turkey responsible for issues such as disappearances, violations of property and the right to life. **Turkey and the TRNC criticized the ECtHR's stance:** The Court's decision to ignore the TRNC and place all the responsibility on Turkey was considered as disregarding the will of the Turkish Cypriot people and their property arrangements. The Turkish side argued that the restitution of property could not be implemented unilaterally without a solution. In this process, the TRNC *established the Immovable Property Commission (TMK) in 2005* and introduced a mechanism to resolve the individual applications of the Greek Cypriots through compensation/exchange/restitution. In 2010, the ECHR recognized this commission as an effective domestic remedy. In 2022, the Council of Europe also endorsed the role of the IPC, ending the follow-up of the Loizidou decision. However, the Greek Cypriot side continues not to recognize the TMK for political reasons. **In summary, the ECtHR's approach has never been found to be fair.**

The Search for a Solution: Post-2004 Negotiations and the Deadlock

Post-EP and Resumption of Negotiations: A new process began in 2008 when the leaders changed in Cyprus after the rejection of the Annan Plan. Between 2008 and 2012, *the Talat-Christofias* talks, and in 2014, *the Eroğlu-Christofias/Anastasiades* talks, negotiating tables were repeatedly established. In February 2014, the leaders of the two communities announced in a joint statement that they were committed to the goal of a solution on the basis of a federation, but concrete progress was limited. **The most serious attempt at rapprochement** took place during the negotiations between Mustafa Akıncı (TRNC President) and Nikos Anastasiades (Greek Cypriot Administration President) in the 2015-2017 period. The conference held in Crans-Montana, Switzerland in July 2017⁹ with the participation of guarantors ended in failure due to a disagreement over guarantees and security. While the Turkish side does not compromise on Turkey's guarantor and the condition that some of its soldiers remain on the island; The Greek Cypriot side and Greece defended the thesis of zero guarantees and zero troops. This difference could not be overcome, and since then the **perspective of a united federation has reached an impasse**.

The Turkish Side's Two-State Policy: As a result of the election of Ersin Tatar as president of the TRNC in 2020 and the increasing national sensitivity in Turkey with the tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean in the same period, the two-state solution on the basis of sovereign equality¹⁰ is emphasized; It is clearly stated that there will be no return to federation negotiations without recognizing the sovereign equal status of the TRNC. At the UN-supervised 5+1 informal conference in Geneva in April 2021, Tatar put forward this new vision, but it was not reciprocated. The Greek Cypriot side and the international community are still committed to the federation thesis. Therefore, as of 2021, there can be no formal negotiations, only informal contacts and **Confidence Building Measures (VAS)** packages¹¹ remain on the agenda.

⁹ The 2017 Crans-Montana Conference witnessed extensive negotiations that were seen as the last chance for a solution to the Cyprus problem, but they were inconclusive due to the Greek Cypriot side's insistence on completely ending Turkey's guarantor and military presence on the island. The Turkish side, especially with the view represented by President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and TRNC President Mustafa Akıncı, stated that "removing the unilateral security mechanism will leave the Turkish Cypriot people with the risk of attack that they experienced between 1963 and 1974" and emphasized that the guarantor system can be updated, but its complete abolition can never be accepted. In addition, the Turkish side argued that the Greek Cypriot leader Nikos Anastasiades did not show political will on the federal solution, and that he "deliberately locked the process by taking a step back" at the last stage. For this reason, Turkey and the TRNC see the collapse of Crans-Montana as a result of the Greek Cypriot side's imposition of "zero troops, zero guarantees" and the mentality that does not accept the Turkish presence on the island as an equal founding partner.

¹⁰ According to this approach, there are two separate peoples, two separate democracies and two separate sovereign states on the island; A solution is not possible without acknowledging this fact. Basic Principles: 1. Sovereign Equality: The Turkish Cypriot people have equal sovereignty with the Greek Cypriot people. This is equality; It means freedom in internal affairs, equal status in foreign relations and the right to self-determination. According to the Turkish side, the Republic of Cyprus is no longer a bi-communal structure; In 1963, the Greek Cypriots broke the partnership by excluding the Turks. 2. Existence of Two States: The Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus in the North and the Republic of Cyprus in the South continue to exist de facto. International recognition of these two states on equal status is seen as a prerequisite for the settlement process. 3. Collaborative solution: This model proposes a framework in which two states can live together and cooperate in various fields (trade, energy, security, etc.). However, this cooperation is not a "federation"; It is based on a state-to-state relationship.

¹¹ The Confidence Building Measures (VAS) Package are the technical and practical cooperation steps proposed to establish trust between the Turkish and Greek Cypriot sides in Cyprus, to facilitate daily life and to lay the groundwork for negotiations. Before the political solution, it is aimed to increase the mutual contact and cooperation of the two communities. GAO packages are usually brought up under the auspices of the UN or the EU. Example VAS headings:

Opening of new border crossings Common mobile phone line and power grid connection Investigating the fate of missing persons Restoration of cultural heritage sites Joint disaster management and environmental projects (e.g. solar energy)

Recent Diplomatic Moves: Nikos Christodoulides, who was elected as the leader of the Greek Cypriot Administration in 2023, suggested that the European Union be more actively involved in order to overcome the impasse. The idea was put forward that the EU should appoint a representative and accompany the negotiation process. In addition, Christodoulides has often stated that the development of Turkey-EU relations depends on progress towards the Cyprus solution. As a matter of fact, during the NATO summit in July 2023, French President Emmanuel Macron gave the message to President Erdoğan that *"Europe cannot progress without Cyprus"* and emphasized that Turkey's EU process depends on the developments in Cyprus. Macron declared **that there can be no solution other than a united Federal Cyprus** and that the UN parameters should not be changed. Both sides know that this is just a "repetition of old memorizations".

New York 5+1 Meeting (July 2025): On the initiative of UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, an informal meeting on Cyprus with an *"expanded 5+1 format"* was held in New York on 18 July 2025. This meeting, which was attended by two community leaders, three guarantors (Turkey, Greece, the United Kingdom) and the UN, focused on **confidence-building steps rather than political** negotiations. Guterres announced that progress has been made on four of the 6 VASs agreed in March 2025: the establishment of a *bi-communal youth committee, environmental-climate initiatives, the protection of common cultural heritage (cemeteries), and the technical details of demining*. However, there was no progress on the two most important VASs, namely *the opening of new border crossings and the establishment of solar power plants*, and the parties could not agree on the location of the border gates. The **Turkish side** stated that they proposed a new transit route through Tenantkoy, while the Greek Cypriot side prevented reconciliation by insisting on passage through the UN buffer zone. **Tatar** said the meeting was constructive, but *"the lack of concrete progress was disappointing."* He once again stressed that *it would not be possible for them to start formal negotiations* without recognizing the sovereign equality and equal international status of the TRNC. **Greek Cypriot leader Christodoulides**, on the other hand, pointed to the lack of political will and *said that he saw "small but important progress towards the goal of resuming talks"*. The two leaders agreed to meet again in New York during the week of the UN General Assembly in September 2025 and to reconvene the post-election 5-party conference in the TRNC. French President Emmanuel Macron welcomed the New York meeting and reiterated his support for a federation solution in line with UN parameters. The Turkish side, on the other hand, rightly continues its criticism of the UN and the EU, emphasizing that the international community does not put pressure on the Greek Cypriots for a federation and that the current status quo imposes isolation on the Turkish Cypriots.

Critical Perspective on the United Nations and the ECtHR: At this point, **the UN's approach that does not hold the Greek Cypriot side sufficiently responsible for the deadlock** is criticized. While calls are made every time for the withdrawal of Turkish troops and the opening of Varosha (Closed Maraş),¹² the demand of the Turkish Cypriots for equal status remains unanswered. Although the UN Peacekeeping Force (UNFICYP) continues to operate on the island, the fact that it has not even signed an official protocol with the TRNC authorities creates a sovereignty dispute. **On the ECtHR front**, Turkey claims that the rights of its own citizens and Turkish Cypriots have been violated: For example, although the return of Turkish waqf properties in the South has not been ensured, the ECtHR does not take this issue on the agenda, but only deals with the property cases of the Greek Cypriots. The Greek Cypriot attempts not to recognize the TRNC courts and the TMK are not seen as well-intentioned by the Turkish side. In summary, **Ankara and Nicosia (TRNC) find** the attitude of international organizations *to be double standards: Prioritizing the view that "there can be no solution without recognizing the sovereign equality of the Turkish Cypriots"*, they express at every opportunity that the current status quo is not sustainable.

Eastern Mediterranean Energy Geopolitics and the "Blue Homeland"

Discoveries and Conflicts in the Eastern Mediterranean: Since the end of the 2000s, important natural gas discoveries have been made around the island of Cyprus and in the Levant basin. U.S. geological surveys have uncovered gas fields such as *Tamar (2009)* and *Leviathan (2010)* off the coast of Israel, *Zohr (2015)* in Egypt, *Aphrodite (2011)*, *Kalypso*, *Glaukos (2018-2019)* in the south of Cyprus. **The Greek Cypriot administration** unilaterally declared an Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) on behalf of Cyprus and signed maritime delimitation agreements with Egypt (2003), Lebanon (2007) and Israel (2010). In these agreements, the areas claimed by the TRNC and Turkey were not taken into account. Then, the Greek Cypriot Administration issued licenses to international oil companies and started hydrocarbon exploration in 13 parcels. Turkey and the TRNC opposed the Greek Cypriot side's **sole exploitation of the riches to which the Turkish Cypriots have equal rights**. In 2011, the *Continental Shelf Delimitation Agreement* was signed between the TRNC and Turkey, and the TRNC granted

Joint youth or sports organizations

Finally, at the 5+1 meeting in New York in July 2025, the UN Secretary-General presented a new 6-point VA package to the parties, but limited progress was made on only four items. VASs are not a substitute for a political solution, but they aim to keep the channels of trust and communication alive between the two sides.

¹² Closed Maraş is under the sovereignty of the TRNC; therefore, the administrative disposal of the region belongs to the TRNC authorities.

licenses to the Turkish Petroleum Corporation (TPAO) for possible resources around the island. Thus, in some parcels in the south of Cyprus, Turkish and TRNC license areas began to coincide with the licenses announced by the Greek Cypriot Administration.

Blue Homeland Doctrine: Turkey adopted the concept of the "Blue Homeland" in the 2010s to protect its rights in maritime jurisdictions¹³. This doctrine is a strategy to defend Turkey's sovereign rights in the Black Sea, the Aegean and the Mediterranean to the maximum. Stating that the maps drawn by Greece and the Greek Cypriot Administration in the Eastern Mediterranean (especially the unofficial "Seville Map") confine Turkey to the Gulf of Antalya, Ankara **emphasized that every state has reasonable continental shelf rights according to international law.** In this context, between 2018 and 2020, Turkey carried out hydrocarbon exploration in a wide region, including the areas authorized by the TRNC, with the drilling ships Fatih, Yavuz, Kanuni and the Barbaros, Oruç Reis seismic research vessel. Especially in the summer of 2020, the Oruc Reis ship's research near Meis Island led to a major crisis with Greece. During this period, **NATO had to step in and** establish mechanisms to prevent conflict between Turkey and Greece. The EU, on the other hand, tried to impose some restrictive measures on Turkey in solidarity with the Greek Cypriot Administration and Greece. However, thanks to the mediation of Germany, tensions were reduced at the end of 2020.

Turkey-Libya Maritime Jurisdiction Agreement (2019): A turning point in the Eastern Mediterranean energy equation was **the Memorandum of Understanding on maritime jurisdiction areas signed between Turkey and the internationally recognized Government of Libya on November 27, 2019.** With this agreement, Turkey extended the western boundaries of its continental shelf in the Eastern Mediterranean to the Libyan coast. The agreement was reported to the United Nations and registered by the UN Secretariat on December 12, 2019. **While Ankara and Tripoli** emphasize that this agreement is a fair delimitation in accordance with international law; Athens and Nicosia strongly opposed. Greece expelled Libya's ambassador to Athens, arguing that the agreement usurped maritime powers south of the island of Crete. Then, Greece signed a partial EEZ agreement with Egypt in August 2020 (excluding the island of Meis). Turkey and the Libyan government have declared *that the Athens-Cairo agreement violates their rights.* As a matter of fact, **the Libyan government made its last move in 2025:** On May 27, 2025, it submitted a *note verbale to the UN*, stating that it claimed the continental shelf boundaries determined in the Turkey-Libya 2019 agreement and **that Greece and Egypt had no sovereign rights in this region.** In this application of Libya, which was also distributed to the UN General Assembly as an official document, **the 2020 Greek-Egyptian agreement was declared "null and void";** Athens' oil exploration activities in the south of Crete since November 2022 and the license fields it tendered in April 2024 were protested as violations of Libya's continental shelf. In addition, it was stated that the EEZ borders declared by Greece in the Ionian Sea in 2025 encroach on Libya's western maritime powers. **Tripoli accused Athens and Cairo of pursuing "maximalist and unlawful maritime claims" and demanded that all drilling activities in the disputed areas be halted until a fair deal is reached through negotiations.** This move is an important diplomatic achievement that confirms Turkey's theses in the Eastern Mediterranean. Turkey frequently emphasizes that the agreement signed with Libya *"draws the borders of the Blue Homeland"* and invalidates the maps and plans that exclude it in the Eastern Mediterranean, and it is determined to do so.

Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum and Exclusion: The Greek Cypriot Administration, Greece, Israel, Egypt and other actors in the region **established a multilateral initiative called the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum (EastMed Gas Forum)** in January 2020. While the Palestinian Authority, Jordan and even France were included in this platform as members or observers, **Turkey and the TRNC were excluded.** Although the aim of the forum was to evaluate the Eastern Mediterranean gas in cooperation, a cooperation model without Turkey deepened the geopolitical divide. Greece, Israel and the Greek Cypriot Administration, with the support of the EU, **brought the EastMed pipeline project** to the agenda, which would carry Eastern Mediterranean gas to Europe via Israel-Cyprus-Crete-Greece. Ankara, on the other hand, opposed the bypassing, and proposed the option **of a pipeline through Turkey as an alternative to this economically dubious project.** As a matter of fact, over time, even the United States withdrew its support, stating that the EastMed pipeline was not feasible. These developments have shown that it is not easy and impossible to exclude Turkey in energy geopolitics.

¹³ The "Blue Homeland" is a national maritime doctrine with geopolitical, legal and military dimensions that aims to protect Turkey's rights and interests in the seas. It was first put forward by retired Rear Admiral Cihat Yaycı and Admiral Cem Gürdeniz, and has been adopted to defend Turkey's maritime jurisdiction areas in the Eastern Mediterranean, Aegean and Black Seas, especially since the 2010s. It refers to Turkey's maritime jurisdiction areas arising from international law, such as territorial waters, continental shelf, and exclusive economic zone (EEZ). The aim is to protect Turkey's sovereign rights in the seas at the maximum level and to balance against the maps (e.g. Seville Map) from which it is tried to be excluded. Especially in the Eastern Mediterranean, the maximalist demands of the Greek Cypriot Administration and Greece were responded to by the joint maritime jurisdiction areas of Turkey and the TRNC. The 2019 Turkey-Libya Maritime Jurisdiction Agreement is the most important example of this doctrine applied in practice. The presence of the Turkish Navy in the seas is also seen as the military deterrence of this concept. The Blue Homeland is a strategy that redefines Turkey's sovereignty borders and security doctrine in the seas. It is not only geographical, but also at the center of energy, diplomacy and national security policies.

Increasing Strategic Importance of Cyprus: In all this competition, the island of Cyprus has become a geostrategic energy base. Within the framework of its licenses in its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), the Greek Cypriot Administration has agreed with energy giants such as Italian ENI, French Total, American ExxonMobil, Qatar Petroleum. In 2018, when the ENI company attempted to drill in block 6, the Turkish navy intervened in the area and blocked the ship. In 2019, ExxonMobil conducted reconnaissance in block 10 (Glaukus field). This power struggle has turned the island's perimeter into a high-tension zone. **As of 2019, the** Turkish Cypriot side has repeatedly proposed a *"revenue sharing committee"* and proposed that the resources to be found be pooled and operated together before the solution. However, the Greek Cypriot administration rejected this on the grounds that it touched the issue of sovereignty. As a result, natural gas in the Eastern Mediterranean has become an element that makes the Cyprus problem even more important. Turkey's increasing military-naval presence in the Eastern Mediterranean, frequently demonstrating its continental shelf with NAVTEX announcements, and organizing "Blue Homeland exercises" have brought the balance in the region to a new dimension in favor of Turkey.

Cyprus' Strategic Location and the Issue of Military Bases

British Sovereign Bases (SBAs): Cyprus has always attracted the attention of great powers in its history due to its geopolitical position. Even when the island became independent in 1960, the United Kingdom retained its two military bases (Akrotiri and Dhekelia) as sovereign base areas. Currently, an area close to 3% of the island is under British rule. **The RAF Akrotiri base** is used as the most important Western air base for the Middle East. Many activities such as air operations against ISIS in Syria and Iraq in the 2010s, attacks on chemical facilities in Syria in 2018, and evacuation operations from Afghanistan in 2021 were carried out from Akrotiri. In late 2023, British bases were also on the agenda during the Israel-Gaza conflict; **It is a well-known fact that Britain and the United States provide logistical support to Israel from bases in Cyprus.** Although the London government denies these allegations, the UK's intelligence and listening activities in the region (NSA-GCHQ joint facilities) continue from British bases. Recently, the UK has agreed with the Greek Cypriot Administration and started to allow civilian settlements in some of its base areas, but it did not want to reduce its military capacity.

Increased U.S. Presence Again: Although the U.S. did not deploy troops directly to Cyprus during the Cold War, it used British bases. After 1974, the USA tried to remain "neutral" by imposing an arms embargo on the Greek Cypriot Administration for a long time. But in recent years, there has been a marked shift in U.S. policy. In September 2020, the US Congress lifted the arms embargo imposed on the Greek Cypriot Administration. Then, in 2022, they fully included Southern Cyprus in their military training and cooperation programs. **In September 2024, a "Bilateral Defense Cooperation Roadmap" covering the years 2024-2029 was signed between the USA and the Greek Cypriot Administration.** With this agreement, training, exercise and logistical cooperation mechanisms were established between American military personnel and the Greek Cypriot National Guard. Currently, the U.S. also operates a security training center called CYCLOPS near Larnaca. The most striking development is **that the USA has started to use military facilities in the Greek Cypriot Administration. According to satellite images released in November 2024,** *American military equipment and personnel began to be seen at the Evangelos Florakis Naval Base near Limassol and the adjacent newly built Tatlisu/Mari Helicopter Base. The US is preparing to deploy helicopters and aircraft such as the F-35B, which can take off and land vertically, in this facility allocated by the Greek Cypriot Administration in the Mari region. Christodoulides confirmed this new situation by saying, "We do not rule out the constant presence of the United States in Cyprus, just like in Greece."* In addition, it was reported by the Greek Cypriot press that US warplanes were temporarily stationed at Larnaca and Paphos airports, and that US navy ships were anchored at Limassol Port. **Turkey is reacting to these US moves:** Ankara says that arming the Greek Cypriots, breaking Washington's traditional neutral stance, will upset the balance on the island. As a matter of fact, in 2022, upon the inclusion of Cyprus in the *International Military Training Program by the USA*, *Turkey announced that this step would "harm the balance of power on the island"*. With these developments, the US military presence on the Alexandroupolis-Crete line refers to the epicenter line of the strategic military deployment of the United States in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Balkans in recent years. The U.S. military presence on the Alexandroupolis-Crete line, as a geopolitical military belt that stretches between the port of Alexandroupoli in northern Greece and the Souda Base on the island of Crete, is an important pillar of Washington's strategy to contain Russia, access to the Middle East, and intervene in the energy-geopolitical competition in the Eastern Mediterranean. Turkey, on the other hand, considers this structure as a strategic siege line that threatens its national security and the Blue Homeland doctrine. In other words, it cannot be separated from the US military presence in Cyprus.

France and Other Actors: France is one of the European powers that has recently increased its military presence in Cyprus. In 2017, a defense cooperation agreement was signed between France and the Greek Cypriot Administration. *It was agreed to expand the Evangelos Florakis Naval Base to provide logistical support to French ships.* In 2020, during the tension in the Eastern Mediterranean, the French navy and warplanes were temporarily

stationed in Cyprus. Christodoulides announced **that the French military presence in Mari has now become permanent** and that the Greek Cypriot Defense Minister visited Paris to discuss the use of the base. This situation shows France's close military relationship with the Greece-Greek Cypriot Administration bloc in the Eastern Mediterranean. It was also reflected in the British press that England was uncomfortable with this French presence. On the other hand, Israel has also developed defense cooperation with the Greek Cypriot Administration; The two countries conduct regular exercises, Israeli warplanes carry out training flights in Cypriot airspace. Israel also sells advanced UAV and missile systems to the Greek Cypriot Administration. **Thus, the Greek Cypriot administration** is trying to weave a safety net *with actors such as the USA, France, Israel and Egypt by using the advantage of diplomatic recognition*. This has turned the Cyprus problem into an equation of regional alliances.

Security Concerns of Turkey and the TRNC: The Turkish side sees the efforts to militarize the island as a direct threat to its own security. It was announced that Turkey would take countermeasures in the event of the deterioration of the balanced arms status applied to the island since 1974. As a matter of fact, in 2023, Turkey increased the shipment of weapons and ammunition to the TRNC; Armed unmanned aerial vehicles (UCAV) were deployed to Geçitkale Airport. The TRNC is also taking steps towards full military integration with Turkey. For example, in 2022, the TRNC Security Forces Command received modern infantry rifles and equipment from the inventory of the Turkish army. **"Our responsibility to protect the Turkish Cypriots remains,"** Turkey said, signaling that it can strengthen its military presence if necessary. In response to the U.S. moves, Turkish officials recalled that *"the Turkish military on the island exists thanks to the Peace Operation and is the guarantor of the security of the Turkish Cypriots."* In addition, Turkey has made it clear that it continues to have guarantor rights and that no other country can establish a military base on the island in violation of the 1960 treaties. In this context, **the United Nations' stance is also questioned:** While the UN Peacekeeping Force (UNFICYP) is stationed on the island, there is no doubt that the silence on the military deployments of the United States and other countries casts a shadow on the UN's neutrality, according to Turkey. As a result, the issue of bases on the island has also made the Cyprus problem **a part of the international power competition**.

Reflection of Regional Developments: Conflicts and alliance changes in the Middle East also affect the military-political situation in Cyprus. For example, the Israel-Gaza war that broke out in 2023 caused the Greek Cypriot Administration to openly take a stand on Israel's side; The Greek Cypriot administration provided logistical and diplomatic support to Israel. The Greek Cypriot opposition AKEL *criticized the government for "complicity in the massacres in Gaza"* and called on it to abandon its pro-Israel policies. Turkey, in turn, strongly supported the Palestinian cause and strongly condemned Israel. During the Syrian civil war, Turkey and the Greek Cypriot Administration stood in different camps: while Turkey carried out military operations in northern Syria, British bases participated in coalition operations against the Damascus regime; Russia, on the other hand, got closer to the Greek Cypriot Administration on the issue of sea ports (the Greek Cypriot Administration allowed Russian warships to visit the ports, although this closeness decreased with the Ukraine war). **The Libyan civil war** also pitted Turkey against the Greek Cypriot Administration/Greece: the Greek Cypriot side was in the bloc supporting General Haftar, while Turkey supported the Tripoli government. In this whole picture, the geopolitical value of Cyprus *has increased in terms of being a safe Western base close to crises such as Palestine, Syria and Libya*. On the one hand, the island has become a platform for the US-UK to intervene in the Middle East, and on the other hand, it has become a chess piece that actors such as Russia and China are interested in. **Turkey emphasizes that it will not be left out of this strategic equation and that this is a threat to its own security.** It resolutely continues to pursue an active maritime policy with the vision of the "Blue Homeland" against the filling of the power vacuum in the Eastern Mediterranean with non-regional actors.

The Meaning of the "Peace Operation" 51 Years Later and Today's Point

Historical Significance of the Operation: Despite the passage of half a century, the Cyprus Peace Operation of July 20, 1974 is a *historical turning point* for the Turkish side. This operation is a symbol of liberation in the struggle for existence of the Turkish Cypriot people. Thanks to this strategic success of the Turkish Armed Forces on the war front, the Enosis plans were foiled and the fact that there were two separate peoples on the island [was ytb.gov.tr accepted by the international community](https://www.ytb.gov.tr). Although the name of the operation was "Peace", its de facto result was **to provide a lasting peace environment for both peoples of the island** – the fact that there has been no large-scale hot conflict on the island since 1974 also demonstrates the success of this operation. Turkish Cypriots continue to live in security under their rule after years of persecution and migration in the 1960s. From Turkey's point of view, the operation lives on as a national pride that *saves the lives of its compatriots through the exercise of its legitimate right to intervene arising from international law*. Peace and Freedom Day, which is celebrated in Turkey and the TRNC on every anniversary, conveys this positive meaning of the operation to new generations.

Ongoing Search for a Solution: However, although the operation brought peace, it **could not solve the political problem**, on the contrary, *it turned into a frozen conflict*. After 51 years, Cyprus is still divided; The Turkish state in the North was not recognized, while the Greek state in the South maintained its international identity representing the entire island. While this imbalance brought about isolation and embargoes against the Turkish side, it provided a comfort that reinforced the intransigence of the Greek Cypriot side – because EU membership and international recognition did not leave the Greek Cypriot administration with immediate motivation for a solution. **Although the parameters of the United Nations** have not changed for half a century, the negotiations remain inconclusive. This has strengthened *the idea of evaluating different alternatives on the Turkish side*. At this point, the vast majority of the Turkish Cypriot people are in favor of keeping their current state alive if there is no agreement on the basis of sovereign equality. Turkey has carried this vision to diplomacy.

Criticism of the International Attitude: The stance of institutions such as the UN, the EU and the ECtHR on Cyprus continues to be criticized by the Turkish side. For example, the UN Security Council did not obtain the consent of the TRNC even when renewing the mandate of the UN Peacekeeping Force in January 2023; The TRNC Ministry of Foreign Affairs described this as a violation of sovereign rights. These developments **bring to the fore the need to make the voice of the Turkish Cypriots heard on international platforms**. In recent years, the TRNC has been trying to increase its visibility in the diplomatic field by taking part in the Organization of Turkic States as an observer member.

The Search for a New Balance in the Eastern Mediterranean: The Cyprus problem has now become a part of not only the two communities, but also **the energy and security equation of the Eastern Mediterranean**. Therefore, the search for a solution can be part of a regional grand bargain. For example, in order to make progress in Turkey's relations with the EU (such as updating the Customs Union, visa liberalization, opening a membership chapter), the EU side often puts forward the Cyprus condition. Similarly, when some of Turkey's vetoes came to the fore in NATO (for example, during the Sweden membership process), it was reported in the press that flexibility on the Cyprus issue was inculcated behind the scenes. Actors such as France and Greece **want to link Turkey's full normalization with the West to concessions in Cyprus**. Turkey, on the other hand, continues to see Cyprus as its national cause and does not give a premium to such negotiations and has demonstrated on every platform that it is not possible for it to do so.

Conclusion - Future of Peace: 51 years after the Cyprus Peace Operation, the goal of *lasting peace and a comprehensive solution on the island* has still not been realized. However, half a century of de facto stability is not a significant achievement. Today, the Turkish Cypriot people continue to live with their democratic institutions in their own state structure; Despite the economic and diplomatic embargoes, the Motherland continues to exist with the support of Turkey. The Greek Cypriot people, on the other hand, continue their economic development under the umbrella of an internationally recognized state, but they are forced to live with the military tensions brought about by the lack of a solution. Recently, the military build-up and blocs around the island have increased the risks for all parties. **From the point of view of Turkey and the TRNC**, the realistic path to a solution will be possible with the acceptance of the realities on the island – that is, the recognition of the equal sovereign status of the Turkish Cypriot people.

In the final analysis, when we look back at the anniversary of the Cyprus Peace Operation, **we see that an intervention that changed the course of history brought peace**, but there is still a long way to go before peace turns into a permanent agreement. Turkey and the Turkish Cypriot side will continue to seek a just and lasting solution in Cyprus by continuing to make its just case on international platforms and supporting it with practical steps on the ground when necessary. **The peace that came to the island 51 years ago will** only be possible if the parties accept a consensus based on facts and the international community abandons its partisanship and takes a fair stance. This can only be achieved by respecting the rights of the Turkish Cypriot people – because the spirit of the Peace Operation is the determination to protect the life, property and dignity of the Turkish Cypriots. This spirit is still at the heart of our policies in the Eastern Mediterranean today.

Resources: (aa.com.tr, yurtsever.org.tr, bugunkibris.com, tovima.com, tr.euronews.com)

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