

PROPOSAL FOR A RESOLUTION [6]: TOWARDS A COMMON EUROPEAN POLICY IN THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN

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

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

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

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28 In the meanwhile, older conflicts in the region continue to fester. The situation in Cyprus, 17 years after
29 its accession to the Union, still faces significant challenges on the path towards a lasting solution on the
30 basis of a Bi-Zonal, Bi-Communal Federation, with political equality, despite the pronounced desire by
31 UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres to resolve it. In the aftermath of the deadlock at the 2017 Crans-
32 Montana Conference, it is particularly troubling that for the first time both the Turkish and the Turkish-
33 Cypriot community leadership openly advocate the two-state solution, as the basis for any future nego-
34 tiations. The civil war in Libya has stopped following the signing of a ceasefire in October 2020 and the

35 formation of an interim government of national unity but the peace is fragile. Lebanon is still prone to
36 deep societal divisions and a malfunctioning political system which have been exacerbated by an eco-
37 nomic crisis and chaos following the explosion at the port of Beirut in August 2020. In May 2021, vio-
38 lence in Israel and Palestine resurfaced in East Jerusalem, leading to upwards of 200 deaths and pointed
39 to the responsibility of all leaders to act against extremists,

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

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

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

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65 In light of the progress made by Greece and Turkey since the restart of the exploratory talks in January
66 2021, the European Council, while stressing the fragility of the process, re-iterated in the Statement of
67 the Members of the European Council of March 2021, the need to continue to engage with Turkey on
68 these sensitive issues.

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70 The European Parliament adopted Resolution 2020/2774 RSP in September 2020 expressing its solidar-
71 ity with Greece and Cyprus while condemning the Turkish moves in the Eastern Mediterranean. It
72 passed the subsequent Resolution 2020/2844 RSP in November 2020 condemning the Turkish illegal
73 actions in the city of Varosha and called for the resumption of diplomacy and dialogue for the resolution
74 of the Cypriot conflict. In a new Resolution, adopted in May 2021, the European Parliament re-affirmed
75 Turkey’s important role as a partner in the correct management of the migration crisis but also called

76 on the Turkish government to respect the rule of law and fundamental rights and avoid the democratic
77 backslide observed in the recent years. The European Parliament also expressed its deep concern about
78 Turkey's unprecedented illegal behaviour in the Eastern Mediterranean, which violates both the sover-
79 eignty and the sovereign rights of EU Member States and international law and by the related security
80 and stability risks. It stressed that a sustainable conflict resolution can only be found through dialogue,
81 diplomacy and negotiations in a spirit of goodwill and in line with international law.

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

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

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

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109 The Conference on the Future of Europe, which started on the 9th of May, presents a unique oppor-
110 tunity to discuss with the citizens the complexity of the situation, the need for a united common ap-
111 proach and the pressing need to develop a holistic and sustainable European policy in the Eastern Med-
112 iterranean.

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114 In this context, and keeping in mind the previous UEF statement of September 2020 concerning a Euro-
115 pean solution to the problems in the Eastern Mediterranean,

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117 The UEF:

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