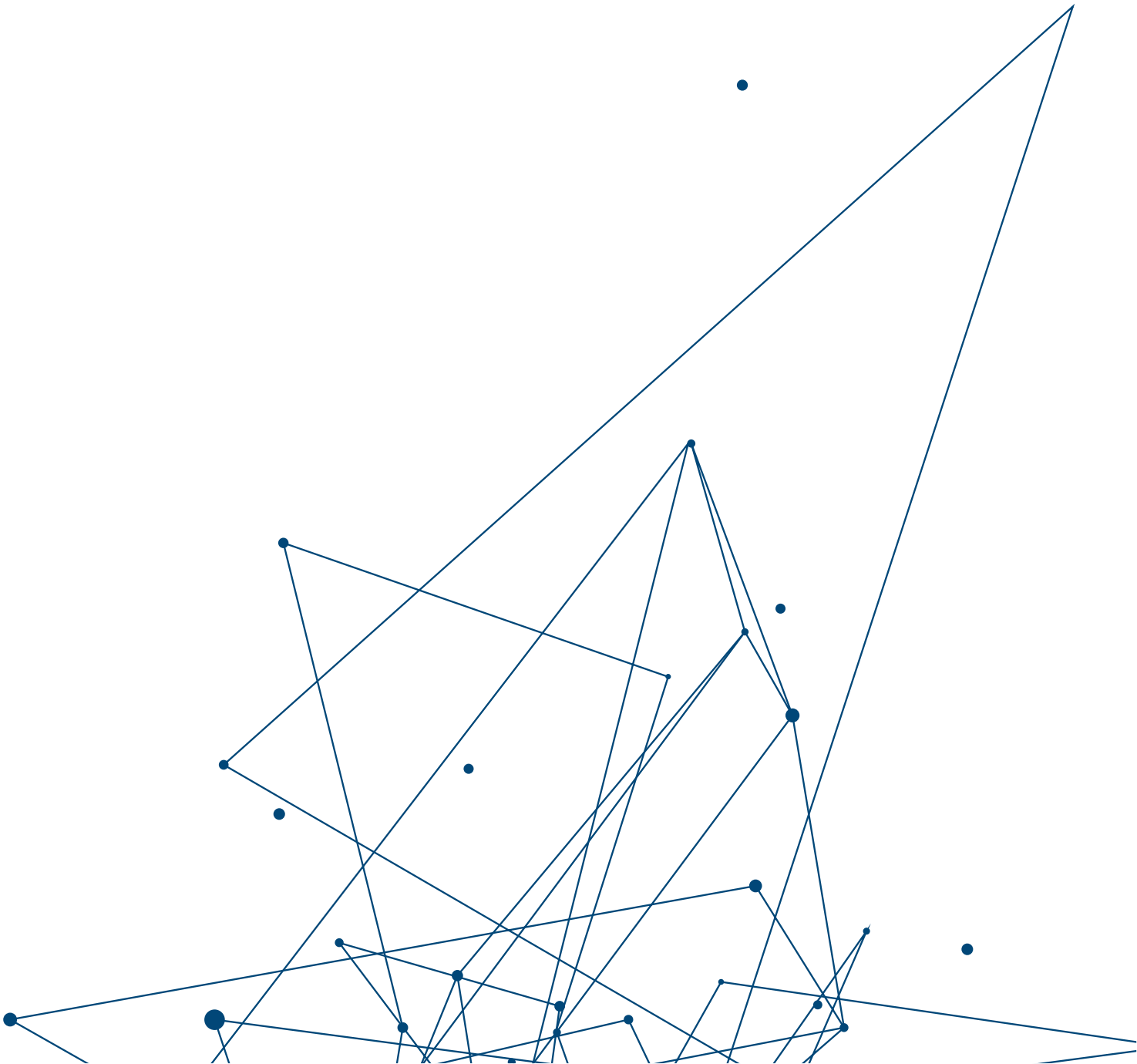


CATS NETWORK PAPER | NO. 22 | 08.07.2025

European Security: A Greek Perspective

Antonia Dimou



The Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 has transformed Europe's security situation. Europe and the United States have increased their military spending to support Ukraine in its defence. But fundamental questions have arisen regarding Europe's defence autonomy, the role of NATO, and the possibilities for non-EU allies to participate in shaping the European defence landscape. As a non-EU NATO member, Türkiye holds a central place in the evolving European defence architecture, despite the EU's scepticism. The paper traces the evolution of European security and defence policies and presents Greek perceptions on Türkiye's foreign and security policies including Ankara's Eastern Mediterranean policies and its balancing act between Ukraine and Russia. Greece's threat perceptions are also laid out along with military comparisons between Greece and Türkiye, and Greek public perceptions of relations with Türkiye. The paper argues that any Turkish contribution to a European security order must address Greek threat perceptions and de-escalate tensions with the EU. Only then can the dominant zero-sum perceptions make way for a more positive win-win approach.

This paper is part of a CATS Network Papers series exploring the role of Turkey in a future European security order, particularly in light of the EU's ongoing challenges, first and foremost being the war in Ukraine. As part of this series, CATS has commissioned nine country reports for several EU member states, as well as for Ukraine and Turkey, with the aim of identifying both the opportunities and the constraints for enhanced cooperation between Turkey and the EU within an evolving security order.

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1.

European Security Amidst Geopolitical Tensions

Russia's war in Ukraine has changed Europe. In addition to fuelling regional instability, it has accelerated the move towards a revised multipolar order – in which Europe can play a crucial role. The Ukraine war has also affected power dynamics in other geopolitical regions, like the Middle East. The demise of the Assad regime in Syria has been largely attributed to declining Russian military and political support due to the war in Ukraine.¹

Russia's war in Ukraine, at the heart of the European continent, thus has wider implications, ranging from energy supply to the present and future European security architecture. The significance of NATO's partnerships with the EU and the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) for European security is undeniable. NATO has grown with the accession of Finland and Sweden, both of which now come under the common defence guarantee.² Finland's accession has also strengthened NATO's reach, as it shares a 1,340-kilometre border with Russia.

While European countries remain united in their support for Ukraine, the debate on strengthening Europe's strategic autonomy, in other words, Europe's ability to invest more in its defence, has gained traction within European institutions. Consolidating the European defence industry and developing common weapons systems and other products will require a renewed European Defence Agency (EDA) to place European defence in European hands. The endorsement of the EDA's mandate in mid-2024 is a step in the right direction, moving to consolidate the alignment of EU defence

¹ Johanna Ubarncik, "Al-Assad's fall: A blow to Russia's influence and the shifting dynamics in Syria", *Euronews* (online), 24 December 2024, <https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2024/12/24/al-assads-fall-a-blow-to-russias-influence-and-the-shifting-dynamics-in-syria> (accessed 21 March 2025).

² Article 5 is NATO's mutual defence clause, under which an attack on one member is regarded as an attack on all. NATO, *Collective defense and Article 5* (Brussels, 04 July 2023), <http://bit.ly/3I7Zf6Q> (accessed 24 September 2024).

initiatives, policies, and legislation.³ Joint procurement, common defence research, and promoting technology and innovation are the EDA's core priorities for enhancing European military capabilities and ensuring that the EU can act resolutely and autonomously.

Against that background, the issuance of Eurobonds exclusively for EU defence remains at the core of the evolving discussions. The proposal has initially been supported by France, Greece and Estonia. As a long-term debt instrument, Eurobonds would enable European countries to strengthen both their national defence industries and the European defence industry. Europe would not be forced to make major purchases outside the Union. The fragmentation of the EU defence industry reduces its production capacity. The war in Ukraine has unquestionably revealed the deficiencies of European defence stocks, which have been unable to supply adequate resources to sustain Ukraine's war needs.

As a frontline member of both the EU and NATO, Greece has consistently advocated for increasing European defence spending to enable the development of collective military capabilities and readiness, in order to credibly deter military aggression and de facto cement Europe's defence autonomy.⁴ The Greek proposal to exclude member states' defence expenditure from their fiscal targets,⁵ has been incorporated into the European Commission's "ReArm Europe Plan/Readiness 2030", which allows member states to activate the national escape clause of the Stability and Growth Pact. This will create the budgetary space for European countries to increase their defence spending without violating the established fiscal rules.⁶

At the same time and equally importantly, the Ukraine war has underlined that the heart of Europe's security lies within NATO and that the EU has ample potential to support the Alliance's activities. That was the rationale behind the US-led Operation Atlantic Resolve, which operates to counter the Russian aggression against NATO, reinforce the Alliance, and facilitate security assistance activities in support of Ukraine. Nineteen NATO members, the majority from Europe, have provided military

³ European Defence Agency (EDA), *EU defence ministers approve reinforced mandate for EDA* (Brussels, 28 May 2024), <https://eda.europa.eu/news-and-events/news/2024/05/28/eu-defence-ministers-approve-reinforced-mandate-for-eda> (accessed 24 September 2024).

⁴ Kyriakos Mitsotakis, "Europe must spend more on its own defence", *Financial Times* (online), 02 February 2025, <https://www.ft.com/content/94d19837-996b-40f1-8a1b-30ba68724091> (accessed 21 March 2025).

⁵ "Mitsotakis welcomes plan to exempt defense spending from EU budget constraints", *eKathimerini* (online), 14 February 2025, <https://www.ekathimerini.com/politics/foreign-policy/1261725/mitsotakis-welcomes-plan-to-exempt-defense-spending-from-eu-budget-constraints/> (accessed 23 March 2025).

⁶ European Commission (EC), "Commission unveils the White Paper for European Defence and the ReArm Europe Plan/Readiness 2030", Press release (Brussels, 19 March 2025), https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_25_793 (accessed 19 March 2025).

resources and training to Ukrainian military forces, across a broad range of capabilities including artillery, air defence, manoeuvre, and maritime operations.⁷

1.1

Enhancing European Defence Capabilities and the EU-NATO Partnership

The war in Ukraine has highlighted the importance of strengthening European defence capabilities and streamlining cooperation and task sharing between NATO and the EU, given that the threats to Europe's security have reached levels not seen since the Second World War. The threats derive primarily from systemic competition between the great powers and the use of force by state and non-state actors in an era of geopolitical fractures.

While the partnership with NATO is the cornerstone of European collective defence, European countries have come to realise that enhancing EU-NATO cooperation with a European defence union and a European pillar within NATO would allow them to assume greater responsibility for their defence and security, and to achieve greater strategic autonomy. In light of the growing security challenges in the Eastern Mediterranean and on NATO's eastern flank, Greece commits significant annual military expenditure to enhancing the capabilities of its armed forces and safeguarding its territorial integrity.⁸

The election of Donald Trump as US President has placed a question mark over Washington's traditional commitment to NATO's collective defence. European countries will have to assume control of their own defence rather than relying on American security guarantees. President Trump has already stated publicly that NATO members' defence spending targets should be at least 5 per cent of GDP.⁹ As NATO's

⁷ US Department of Defense, *Special Inspector General (SIG) report to the United States Congress, Operation Atlantic Resolve: Including US government activities related to Ukraine* (Washington D.C.: 01 January–31 March 2024), https://media.defense.gov/2024/Jul/08/2003498961/-1/-1/1/OAR_Q2_MAR2024_FINAL_508.PDF/OAR_Q2_MAR2024_FINAL_508.PDF#page=23 (accessed 06 May 2025).

⁸ Greece spends almost 3.5 per cent of its GDP on defence; approximately 45 per cent of the defence budget is spent on major equipment purchases and modernisation. Sarantis Michalopoulos, "Greece passes new budget, reassures defence spending", *Euractiv* (online), 16 December 2024, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/news/greece-passes-new-budget-reassures-defence-spending/> (accessed 20 March 2025).

⁹ "Nato: Why the Prospect of Trump 2.0 Is Putting Such Intense Pressure on the Western Alliance", *The Conversation* (online), 15 January 2025, <https://theconversation.com/nato-why-the-prospect-of->

secretary-general said, this represents a shift to a wartime mindset in national planning.¹⁰ It remains to be seen whether the United States will shift its military assets and defence spending from Europe to Asia in pursuit of a strategy of prioritising the threat from China.¹¹

Even before Trump's election to his second term as US President, EU member states had begun stepping up their collective defence in accordance with the commitments outlined in the Versailles Declaration.¹² The Versailles Declaration envisions strengthening Europe's armed forces for national, NATO and EU purposes. To this end, the President of the European Commission named the first-ever Commissioner for Defence and Space on 1 December 2024.¹³ The appointment of a dedicated commissioner to drive efforts to support Europe's defence industry, procurement and research is significant. It will facilitate coordination between EU member states to ensure that they meet the targets specified in the European Defence Industrial Strategy,¹⁴ enhancing the EU's defence industrial capacity and boosting interoperability in accordance with NATO standards.

The EU possesses the regulatory frameworks and budgetary resources to address Europe-wide challenges such as hybrid threats and military mobility, and to complement the European narrative of geoeconomic power as a reliable and competent security actor in the geopolitical landscapes of the EU's eastern and the southern neighbourhoods. The European geoeconomic power narrative requires a closer connection between the economic and foreign policy domains to enable the EU to employ economic instruments to expand its influence within the international system.¹⁵ The appointment of a Commissioner for Defence and Space can therefore

[trump-2-0-is-putting-such-intense-pressure-on-the-western-alliance-247067](#) (accessed 12 January 2025).

¹⁰ Joshua Posner, "Europe Splits on Trump's Call to Dramatically Boost Defense Spending", *Politico* (online), 08 January 2025, <https://www.politico.eu/article/donald-trump-tells-allies-spend-5-percent-gdp-defense-nato/> (accessed 12 January 2025).

¹¹ Max Bergmann, *Trump Needs a Plan to Get Europeans to Step Up on Defense* (Washington D.C.: Center for Strategic & International Studies [CSIS], 31 January 2025), <https://www.csis.org/analysis/trump-needs-plan-get-europeans-step-defense> (accessed 31 January 2025).

¹² The Versailles Declaration was adopted on 11 March 2022.

¹³ Andrius Kubilius, former prime minister of Lithuania, is the first EU Commissioner for Defence and Space. European Commission (EC), *Commissioners-designate (2024-2029)* (Brussels, 18 July 2024), https://commission.europa.eu/about/commission-2024-2029/commissioners-designate-2024-2029_en (accessed 12 January 2025).

¹⁴ European Commission (EC), *A new European Defense Industrial Strategy: Achieving EU readiness through a responsive and resilient European Defense Industry – Joint Communication to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions*, JOIN(2024) 10 final (Brussels, 05 March 2024), https://defence-industry-space.ec.europa.eu/document/download/643c4a00-0da9-4768-83cd-a5628f5c3063_en?filename=EDIS%20Joint%20Communication.pdf (accessed 24 September 2024).

¹⁵ Anna Herranz-Surrallés, Chad Damro and Sandra Eckert, "The Geoeconomic Turn of the Single European Market? Empirical Trends and Conceptual Challenges", *Journal of Common Market Studies (JCMS)* 62, no. 1 (2024): 919-937.

signal decisive action to consolidate European defence and create more effective EU-NATO synergies.¹⁶

Before 2022, it was still a question whether enough EU member states would meet the target of spending 2 per cent of GDP on defence to ensure NATO's continuing military readiness. By 2024, most European countries had met the target,¹⁷ while others, like Greece, had surpassed it,¹⁸ contributing to the Alliance's overall capabilities and demonstrating what a close EU-NATO partnership means. European countries, including Greece, advocate for a European Facility¹⁹ to supplement defence spending at the national level with additional European funding.

Reinforcement of the European defence pillar within NATO was explicitly underlined in the Washington Summit Declaration marking NATO's 75th anniversary, which recognised that EU-NATO cooperation has expanded at an unprecedented rate to include "space, cyber, climate and defence, as well as emerging and disruptive technologies".²⁰ The Declaration also acknowledges that European defence is complementary to and interoperable with NATO, and that it must be strengthened to contribute positively to transatlantic and global security. Equally importantly, the Declaration explicitly highlights that "for the strategic partnership between NATO and the EU, non-EU Allies' fullest involvement in EU defence efforts is essential".²¹

While NATO and the EU have many members in common, countries like Canada, Iceland, Türkiye, and the United States are members of NATO but not of the EU. The contribution of non-EU allies to the European security architecture was formalised in 2002 when the European Council outlined the principles of engagement in its conclusions, titled "ESDP: Implementation of the Nice Provisions on the Involvement

¹⁶ Rym Momtaz, *Taking the Pulse: Is Having a European Commissioner for Defense a Mistake?*, Commentary (Brussels: Carnegie Europe, 26 September 2024), <https://carnegieendowment.org/europe/strategic-europe/2024/09/taking-the-pulse-is-having-a-european-commissioner-for-defense-a-mistake?lang=en> (accessed 26 September 2024).

¹⁷ Bulgaria (2.18%), Czech Republic (2.10%), Denmark (2.37%), Estonia (3.43%), Finland (2.41%), France (2.06%), Germany (2.12%), Greece (3.08%), Hungary (2.11%), Latvia (3.15%), Lithuania (2.85%), Montenegro (2.02%), Netherlands (2.05%), Norway (2.20%), Poland (4.12%), Romania (2.25%), Slovakia (2.00%), and Sweden (2.14%).

See also NATO, *Defence Expenditure of NATO Countries (2014–2024)* (Brussels: 12 July 2024a): 9, https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2024/6/pdf/240617-def-exp-2024-en.pdf (accessed 26 September 2024).

¹⁸ Greece is expected to spend more than 3.5 per cent of its GDP on defence in 2024, to modernise its armed forces and contribute to NATO's overall capabilities.

Stuart Lau, "Top EU defence official says some NATO countries eyeing higher defense spending target", *Politico* (online), 30 April 2024, <https://www.politico.eu/article/top-eu-top-defense-official-says-some-nato-countries-eyeing-higher-defense-spending-target/> (accessed 24 September 2024).

¹⁹ Greece proposes a European facility based on the fund established to cope with the negative effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, best known as Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF).

²⁰ NATO, "Washington Summit Declaration", Press release (Washington D.C., 10 July 2024), https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_227678.htm (accessed 21 September 2024).

²¹ *Ibid*, Article 29.

of the Non-EU European Allies”.²² After almost two decades, it has become increasingly clear that non-EU allies’ involvement in European defence has been insufficient due to the lack of a Brussels-based defence planning mechanism enabling EU and non-EU NATO members to cooperate, for example on R&D and procurement. If the EU is to enhance its defence capacity, non-EU allies will have a major role to play as their defence industries can provide technological know-how and further enhance needed capabilities.²³

1.2

Türkiye’s Place in the EU’s Strategic Compass for Security and Defence

Russia is not the sole security threat to European countries. The EU has identified growing challenges from China and the Middle East that require a cohesive threat assessment and response. The creation of a European air defence system modelled on Israel’s Iron Dome, as proposed by Greece,²⁴ to counter eventual missile and drone threats requires common European funding by allocating extra resources to the national budgets of member states. A European “Iron Dome” would complement individual countries’ existing air defence capabilities and defend Europe against missile attack from hostile states and non-state actors.

Rapidly changing geopolitical developments including the election of President Trump have necessitated a review of the Strategic Compass for Security and Defence adopted by the EU member states in 2022 and accelerated the preparation of a white paper on the future of European defence to promote a common European vision based on a joint threat assessment. The 2024 annual progress report on the implementation of the Strategic Compass for Security and Defence²⁵ underscored the EU’s response to

²² Şeyda Hanbay, *Involvement of non-EU European NATO members in common security and defense policy: The Turkish case* (Ankara: Ankara University, 2013), <https://ataum.ankara.edu.tr/wp-content/uploads/sites/209/2018/07/Involvement-of-Non-EU-European-NATO-Members-in-Common-Security-and-Defense-Policy.pdf> (accessed 13 January 2025).

²³ NATO Deputy Secretary-General Radmila Shekerinska underscored the need for non-EU NATO allies and EU countries to increase defence industrial cooperation that will contribute to the acquisition of the essential technological know-how and to the provision of much needed capabilities. The Deputy Secretary-General’s position was expressed in her address at the annual conference “New Horizons in EU Defence”, organised by the European Defence Agency on 22 January 2025. NATO, *Deputy Secretary General: Stepping up NATO-EU cooperation is essential* (Brussels, 22 January 2025), https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_232536.htm (accessed 13 January 2025).

²⁴ “Greece proposed European air defense system modeled after Iron Dome”, *Report News Agency* (online), 16 May 2024, <https://report.az/en/other-countries/greece-proposes-european-air-defense-system-modeled-after-iron-dome/> (accessed 24 September 2024).

²⁵ European Union External Action (EEAS), *Annual Progress Report on the Implementation of the Strategic Compass for Security and Defence* (Brussels, March 2024),

complex threats and challenges in different geopolitical regions. Ukraine, the Sahel, and the Middle East are specifically named, highlighting concrete achievements.

European support for Ukraine to date amounts to €88 billion, including military equipment valued at €28 billion funnelled through bilateral assistance and the European Peace Facility. By the end of 2025, more than one million artillery shells are expected to be delivered by EU countries to Ukraine, and almost €1.9 billion will be extracted from Russian frozen assets in military support for Ukraine.²⁶

Regarding the Sahel, the Middle East and Africa, the 2024 annual progress report states that the European External Action Service (EEAS) Crisis Response Centre in coordination with the Union Civil Protection Mechanism contributed to evacuation operations in the Middle East (from Israel and Gaza) and in the Sahel (from Sudan and Niger). The security of EU partners in Africa is strengthened by training and equipping partners' armed forces and conducting joint naval exercises to cement maritime security cooperation in the Gulf of Guinea.

Preserving freedom of navigation in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden also falls within the EU's strategic priorities. The European Red Sea naval mission, dubbed "Aspides" and operationally headquartered in Greece, has a strictly defensive mandate to guard vessels from attacks by Iranian-aligned Houthi militants who have instrumentalised the war in Gaza to justify their drone and rocket attacks. The Aspides operation is a clear example of how the European Union can act effectively as a maritime security provider.

The European Strategic Compass for Security and Defence underlines the importance of enhancing cooperation between the EU and its allies worldwide to counter threats against the EU and its partners by actors seeking to subvert the rules-based international order.

Türkiye is an EU partner that carries significant geopolitical weight in distinct regions of special strategic interest to Europe. As a NATO member, Türkiye possesses the Alliance's second largest army and hosts the Allied Land Command Headquarters. At the same time, it is also a candidate for full membership of the EU. The relationship between the EU and Türkiye is crucial but difficult and multifaceted. The relationship has been strained over the years due to Türkiye's democratic backsliding, which has

https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/2024/StrategicCompass_2ndYear_Report_o.pdf (accessed 25 September 2024).

²⁶ Kateryna Hodunova, "EU to provide Ukraine with over 1 million shells over 2025, allocate over \$2 billion for military aid from Russian frozen assets", *The Kyiv Independent* (online), 18 May 2025, <https://kyivindependent.com/eu-pledges-to-provide-ukraine-with-over-1-million-rounds-of-shells-plans-to-allocate-over-2-billion-for-military-aid-from-russian-frozen-assets/> (accessed 18 May 2025).

effectively brought accession talks to a standstill since 2018,²⁷ and due to tensions in the territorial waters of Greece and Cyprus. The developments that have negatively affected relations between the EU and Türkiye are explicitly underlined in consecutive European Council Conclusions.²⁸

European institutions regarded “illegal energy exploration and drilling activities in the Eastern Mediterranean” in 2020 as a dangerous escalation by Türkiye.²⁹ Türkiye’s unilateral military operations in northern Syria in 2019 prompted Germany to impose restrictions on arms exports, with export licenses reportedly limited to cooperation projects associated with NATO and spare parts for Türkiye’s navy.³⁰ France has similarly suspended all weapon sales to Türkiye on the basis that the Turkish offensive in northern Syria threatened European security.³¹

EU member states advocate for dialogue with Türkiye and for a comprehensive security architecture and energy cooperation for the Mediterranean. Türkiye has been instrumental in tackling irregular migration and preventing crossings from Turkish territory to the Greek islands, thus limiting the number of migrants reaching central and northern Europe. The EU–Türkiye agreement of 2016, which aimed to stop the flow of irregular migration to Europe via Türkiye, represented a major milestone, and its implementation has entailed close cooperation between Türkiye and Greece.³²

²⁷ The European Council (EC) stated in 2018 that EU negotiations with Turkey had stalled and no new accession chapters could open.

Adam Michalski, *Turkey and the European Union: In a maze of disputes*, (Warsaw: Center for Eastern Studies [OSW], 03 April 2024), <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/osw-commentary/2024-04-03/turkey-and-european-union-a-maze-disputes> (accessed 23 September 2024).

²⁸ The European Council (EC) strongly condemned Turkey’s actions in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Aegean, underlining its full solidarity with Greece in a series of statements.

European Council (EC), *European Council Meeting (22 March 2018) – Conclusions*, EUCO 1/18 (Brussels, 23 March 2018), <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/33457/22-euco-final-conclusions-en.pdf> (accessed 23 September 2024).

²⁹ The European Parliament (EP) adopted resolution P9_TA(2020)0230 condemning Türkiye for sending the drilling ship Yavuz, accompanied by a Turkish navy vessel, into Cyprus’s EEZ, and for signing a Memorandum of Understanding with Libya in November 2019 on the delimitation of maritime boundaries between Türkiye and Libya despite having no adjacent or opposing coasts.

European Parliament (EP), *Resolution of 17 September 2020 on the preparation of the special European Council summit focussing on the dangerous escalation and the role of Türkiye in the Eastern Mediterranean*, Official Journal of the European Union, P9_TA(2020)0230 (Brussels, 17 September 2024), <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:52020IP0230> (accessed 24 September 2024).

³⁰ Levent Kenez, “Ankara urges Germany to lift arms export restrictions and approve Eurofighter purchase”, *Nordic Monitor* (online), 26 April 2024, <https://nordicmonitor.com/2024/04/ankara-urges-germany-to-lift-arms-export-restrictions-and-approve-eurofighter-purchase/> (accessed 23 September 2024).

³¹ “Germany and France ban arms exports to Türkiye after military offensive against Kurds in Syria”, CNBC (online), 12 October 2019, <https://www.cnbc.com/2019/10/12/germany-bans-exports-of-arms-to-turkiye-after-syria-offensive.html> (accessed 21 September 2024).

³² European Commission (EC), “Implementing the EU–Türkiye Agreement – Questions and Answers”, Press release (Brussels, 20 April 2016), https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/el/memo_16_1494 (accessed 21 September 2024).

As armed conflicts in the Middle East proliferate, European anxiety over irregular migration exposes deep political divisions. This has turned migration into a powerful tool for Türkiye's pursuit of foreign policy goals and its request for a substantive increase in funds for migration and border management in the EU's budget for 2021–2027.³³

The EU prioritises engagement with its southern neighbourhood and holds bilateral meetings with Türkiye and other countries. As well as irregular migration, the central topics include terrorism, organised crime, and cyber and hybrid threats.

The EU Strategic Compass for Security and Defence is concretised by the European Commission's White Paper for European Defence Readiness 2030 and a Plan to ReArm Europe.³⁴ The latter provides new funds to expand European defence capabilities, while the White Paper identifies military investment needs. New financial means include the new dedicated instrument for Security Action for Europe (SAFE), with initial funds of €150 billion raised on the capital markets. These funds will enable European member states to enhance their defence investments through common procurement from the European defence industry.³⁵ The ReArm Europe Plan foresees the European Investment Bank expanding its lending to defence and security projects.³⁶

Türkiye can bolster the European defence pillar, considering its longstanding role in the Western security architecture, its flourishing defence industry, and its combat-proven capabilities. But Türkiye's posture over a wide range of security challenges in southern Europe has raised scepticism over the idea of fully embracing Türkiye in European security.

³³ Nina Miholjcic, *Migration as an Instrument of Modern Political Warfare: Cases of Türkiye, Morocco and Belarus*, Working Paper Series No. 12/22, (Jean Monnet Network on EU Law Enforcement, 2022), <https://jmn-eulen.nl/wp-content/uploads/sites/575/2022/05/WP-Series-No.-12-22-Migration-as-an-Instrument-of-Modern-Political-Warfare-Cases-of-Türkiye-Morocco-and-Belarus-Miholjcic.pdf> (accessed 22 September 2024).

³⁴ European Commission (EC), *Joint White Paper for European Defence Readiness 2030*, JOIN(2025) 120 final (Brussels, 19 March 2025), <http://bit.ly/3TrFTvO> (accessed 21 March 2025).

³⁵ European Commission (EC), "Commission unveils the White Paper for European Defence and the ReArm Europe Plan/Readiness 2030", Press release, 19 March 2025, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_25_793 (accessed 22 September 2024).

³⁶ Aurélie Pugnet, "EU investment bank to invest into defence gear in major policy overhaul", *Euractiv* (online), 21 March 2025, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/defence/news/eu-investment-bank-to-invest-into-defence-gear-in-major-policy-overhaul/> (accessed 22 September 2024).

2.

Greek Perceptions of Turkish Foreign and Security Policies

The prevailing view in Western diplomatic and military circles, which is largely shared by Greece, is that Türkiye is seeking to “normalise” its foreign policy. Ankara’s reconciliation efforts vis-à-vis Greece, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the UAE are taken as evidence for this. According to Greek foreign policy and security elites, Turkish foreign policy has three distinct characteristics. The first of these is a desire for strategic autonomy, which means working with various actors including but not limited to its Western and non-Western allies. Ankara’s maintenance of relations with multiple actors, including the United States and the West, China, and Russia, is interpreted as hedging in accordance with its interests.

Secondly, Athens regards Turkish foreign policy as essentially transactional. It is not dictated by values and “anything can be exchanged for anything”, as exemplified by the 2016 migrant deal with the EU under which Türkiye is paid to prevent irregular migrants from heading to Europe. Last but not least, Athens regards securitisation as an essential instrument of Turkish foreign policy.

2.1

Türkiye’s Balancing Act Between Ukraine and Russia

Ankara’s strategic balancing and hedging is best exemplified by its response to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, where Türkiye supports Ukraine diplomatically and militarily in line with its NATO allies, while assisting Russia economically, primarily through increased trade and the export of dual-use goods that expanded by over 55

per cent since the conflict broke out.³⁷ Secondary sanctions imposed by Washington in June 2024 have adversely affected Türkiye–Russia bilateral trade altogether due to fear that Türkiye might lose access to the US dollar. Reportedly, exports to Russia fell by 24 per cent in the first eight months of 2024 compared to the same period in 2023.³⁸

Türkiye’s balancing act between Ukraine and Russia is manifested in Türkiye’s public expression of solidarity with Ukraine and its sales of armed drones, armoured vehicles, and other military equipment.³⁹ Turkish-made Bayraktar drones were used successfully by the Ukrainian military to destroy Russian armoured vehicles and artillery systems. This has translated into Türkiye’s signing of defence export agreements with more than thirty countries. The Turkish defence manufacturer Baykar has announced plans to build a drone factory in Ukraine, on the basis of a deal between Kyiv and Ankara in 2022 before Russia’s full-scale invasion.⁴⁰ Turkish–Ukrainian relations are thus crucial for the development of Türkiye’s growing military industry, not only as an export market but also as a source of know-how.⁴¹

It is noteworthy that the arms trade is a two-way street. Ukraine produces engines for Turkish drones, and Türkiye envisions further cooperative military–industrial

³⁷ Russia remains an important source of energy and tourism for Türkiye.

Pinar Akgul, “Understanding Cooperation in Russian–Turkish Energy Relations”, *Comparative Southeast European Studies* 72, no. 2, 03 May 2024, <https://www.degruyter.com/document/doi/10.1515/soeu-2023-0008/html?lang=en> (accessed 20 September 2024).

³⁸ Secondary sanctions imposed in June 2024 by the US Treasury’s Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) had a direct effect on thirteen Turkish companies trading in machinery, industrial chemicals, internal combustion engines, and electronic products.

Bob Savic, “Secondary sanctions may imperil U.S. financial leadership”, *Geopolitical Intelligence Services AG (GIS)* (online), 31 October 2024, <https://www.gisreportsonline.com/r/secondary-sanctions/>.

Meryem Gökten and Richard Grieveson, *Turkey’s geo-economic shift: An opportunity to revitalise EU integration amid sanctions*, Policy Notes and Reports No. 90 (Vienna: The Vienna Institute for International and Economic Studies [wiiw], December 2024), <https://wiiw.ac.at/turkey-s-geo-economic-shift-an-opportunity-to-revitalise-eu-integration-amid-sanctions-dlp-7097.pdf> (accessed 18 May 2025).

³⁹ Sinan Tavsan, “With drone gift to Ukraine, Türkiye’s Baykar wins fans and clients”, *Nikkei Asia* (online), 29 June 2022, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/Ukraine-war/With-drone-gift-to-Ukraine-Türkiye-s-Baykar-wins-fans-and-clients> (accessed 26 September 2024).

⁴⁰ Pasha Magid, “Türkiye’s drone maker Baykar begins to build plant in Ukraine”, *Reuters* (online), 07 February 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/business/aerospace-defense/Türkiyes-drone-maker-baykar-begins-build-plant-ukraine-2024-02-06/> (accessed 20 September 2024).

⁴¹ The technological characteristics of the Turkish Bayraktar drones have been extensively covered in the Greek press.

“Turkey controls 65% of the global drone market, according to Baykar head” (in Greek), *Fortune Greece* (online), 17 December 2024, <https://www.fortunegreece.com/article/i-tourkia-elegxei-to-65-tis-pagkosmias-agoras-drone-simfona-me-ton-epikefalis-tis-baykar/> (accessed 17 December 2024).

Christos Chtenas, “Σελτσούκ Μπαϊρακτάρ: Η Τουρκία διαθέτει 150 Bayraktar TB2 και 12 Akinci” [Selcuk Bayraktar: Turkey has 150 Bayraktar TB2 and 12 Akinci], *Flight Defense Magazine* (online), 06 June 2023, https://flight.com.gr/bayraktar-interview-about-uav-future/#goog_rewarded (accessed 17 December 2024).

projects. However, Türkiye's public image in Ukraine has declined steadily. As the polls show, Türkiye's approval in Ukraine was very high at the beginning of the war, when its image was mainly associated with the armed drones it supplied, but has plummeted since then.⁴² The reasons for the decline include Türkiye's strong economic ties with Russia and suspicions that it is allowing Moscow to circumvent restrictions imposed under the Montreux Convention that regulates maritime traffic through the Straits. Specifically, suspicions have centred on the use of Russian civilian merchant ships as naval auxiliaries to supply its military operations in Ukraine, thereby violating the spirit of the Montreux Convention.⁴³

Türkiye also endeavours to demonstrate that it is not overly anti-Russia, in particular through robust economic ties, which has aroused some suspicion in the West, including Europe. Türkiye's abstention from Western sanctions helps keep the Russian economy afloat, and Türkiye is widely believed to be a destination for illicit Russian financial flows (a charge Türkiye rejects).⁴⁴ In general, Turkish-Russian relations can be best described as a cooperative rivalry.⁴⁵ Russia and Türkiye seem to share the goal of restricting the presence of non-littoral states in the Black Sea. Additionally, the Turkish and Russian leaderships have a longstanding relationship based on trust.⁴⁶ However, the cooperation would end if one side saw its sovereignty or fundamental interests undermined by the other, for example if Russia were to sabotage the pipelines that deliver the gas on which the Turkish economy depends.

⁴² According to a poll conducted by the New Europe Center, the level of distrust for the Turkish President among Ukrainians increased from 19.5 per cent in 2021 to 46.6 per cent in 2022. New Europe Center, *What Ukrainians think about Ukraine's movement towards EU membership and beyond* (Kyiv: January 2023), https://neweurope.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Eurointegration_wartime_eng.pdf (accessed 20 September 2024).

⁴³ Yörük Işık, *Russia is violating the spirit of Montreux by using civilian ships for war* (Washington D.C.: Middle East Institute [MEI], 18 May 2022), <https://www.mei.edu/publications/russia-violating-spirit-montreux-using-civilian-ships-war> (accessed 01 April 2025).

⁴⁴ Sinan Ciddi, *Sanctioned Russian Bank to Begin Money Transfers to Turkey*, Policy Brief (Washington D.C.: Foundation for Defense of Democracies [FDD], 21 June 2023), <https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2023/06/21/sanctioned-russian-bank-to-begin-money-transfers-to-turkey/> (accessed 12 September 2024).

⁴⁵ The Turkey-Russia relationship has evolved over time from competition to a partnership centred on balancing competition with strategic cooperation. Sinan Ülgen, *Türkiye and Russia: An Unequal Partnership* (Washington D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 24 October 2024), <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2024/10/turkiye-and-russia-an-unequal-partnership?lang=en> (accessed 24 October 2024). Joseph Nye has used the term "cooperative rivalry" to describe how countries collaborate and compete at the same time.

James Chau, "Interview with Joseph Nye: Cooperative Rivalry Can Move Relations Forward", *China US Focus* (online), 22 March 2024, <https://www.chinausfocus.com/foreign-policy/interview-with-joseph-nye-cooperative-rivalry-can-move-relations-forward> (accessed 12 September 2024).

⁴⁶ Aslı Aydıntaşbaş, *With friends like these: Turkey, Russia and the end of an unlikely alliance* (European Council on Foreign Relations [ECFR], June 2016), https://ecfr.eu/wp-content/uploads/WITH_FRIENDS_LIKE_THESE_-_ECFR178.pdf (accessed 12 September 2024). Oktay Tanrısever, *Turkey and Russia in the Black Sea Region: Dynamics of Cooperation and Conflict* (Istanbul: Centre for Economics and Foreign Policy Studies [EDAM], 12 March 2012), <http://bit.ly/3lo8Ypw> (accessed 12 September 2024).

Greek foreign policy and security elites have conflicting opinions about the durability of the current Türkiye–Russia–Ukraine balancing act. The triangle seems highly dependent on factors such as pressure from the West and the dynamics of Türkiye’s rivalry with Russia in other arenas, such as Syria and Libya.

2.2

Increased Strategic Importance of Greece After the Russian Invasion of Ukraine

The dominant European perception of Türkiye’s balancing act between Ukraine and Russia can be summed up as follows: Despite Ankara being a vocal advocate of NATO’s open-door policy and agreeing that Ukraine’s future “lies within NATO”, Türkiye’s broad energy cooperation with Russia and its declared intention to join the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and the BRICS create inconsistencies with its position within NATO, where it subscribes to positions that cite Russia as a direct threat to NATO members’ security.⁴⁷ Athens shares this view.

This perception is accentuated by the high level of mistrust associated with the deepening of Turkish–Russian military–industrial cooperation as evidenced by the responses to Türkiye’s purchase of the Russian S–400 air and missile defence system, which is incompatible with NATO equipment. The imposition of US sanctions on Türkiye in 2020, under section 231 of the Countering America’s Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA) – in response to Türkiye’s purchase of the Russian S–400 system, which could intercept the F–35– stealth aircraft accelerated European concerns over whether Türkiye is gradually drifting away from the West.⁴⁸

Nevertheless, the invasion of Ukraine in 2022 has provided a reminder of Türkiye’s ability to control the Black Sea’s strategic landscape. Under Article 19 of the Montreux Convention, Ankara suspended the transit of Russian naval assets from the Pacific and the Baltic through the Straits. Türkiye also closed the Straits to naval vessels from

⁴⁷ Selcan Hacaoglu and Fırat Kozok, “Türkiye Bids to Join BRICS in Push to Build Alliances Beyond West”, *Bloomberg* (online), 02 September 2024, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2024-09-02/turkiye-submits-bid-to-join-brics-as-erdogan-pushes-for-new-alliances-beyond-west> (accessed 12 September 2024).

NATO, 2024b (paragraph 3).

⁴⁸ This development froze Türkiye’s efforts to acquire the F–35 and caused its expulsion from the consortium building the warplane.

“US sanctions NATO ally Türkiye over Russian S–400 missiles”, *Reuters* (online), 14 December 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/12/14/us-sanctions-nato-ally-turkiye-over-russian-missile-defence> (accessed 10 September 2024).

non-littoral NATO allies.⁴⁹ This decision revealed the importance of Greece as an alternative staging point for delivering American and NATO military assistance to Ukraine, via the Greek ports of Thessaloniki and Alexandroupolis.

Alexandroupolis has become the gateway to an alternative land corridor to the Black Sea, after Türkiye closed the Dardanelles and Bosphorus Straits to naval vessels whose home base is not in the Black Sea. An entire US armoured combat brigade disembarked at Alexandroupolis for the first time in March 2024,⁵⁰ proving that it is a premier gateway to southern Europe and a geostrategic node facilitating the swift deployment of equipment and personnel to multiple locations.

The movement of military assets and personnel through Greece has reaffirmed the solid partnership between American and European armed forces. It also aligned with NATO's strategy of generating rapid combat power to counter any likely aggression and defend NATO allies' territory. Alexandroupolis has become a key NATO logistics hub and is used extensively by five other NATO European allies, namely, France, Italy, Portugal, Spain, and the United Kingdom. As such, it supports NATO's force posture in the contested Black Sea region.⁵¹

The ongoing transformation of Alexandroupolis also cements an emerging axis involving Bulgaria, which plays a central role in US and NATO strategic planning as an alternative to the Straits of Bosphorus, given the importance of the Black Sea. The development of infrastructure around Alexandroupolis exemplifies unfolding strategic planning. For example, there are plans to use NATO funding to extend the Athens-Kavala fuel pipeline to Alexandroupolis and on to Bulgaria, to supply American forces there.

So much American and NATO military equipment flows through the port of Alexandroupolis that Greek military leaders call it the "Souda of the North".⁵² Türkiye's closure of the Straits underlined Greece's strategic and military significance to the United States, NATO and Europe. Since the invasion of Ukraine, the EU's defence policy has undergone a profound transformation to reduce dependence on

⁴⁹ Jared Malsin, "Türkiye Says War Exists in Black Sea, Allowing It to Block Russian Navy", *Wall Street Journal* (online), 28 February 2022, <https://www.wsj.com/livecoverage/russia-ukraine-latest-news-2022-02-26/card/uDQCa9dMZsNGZLQsfWYg> (accessed 20 September 2024).

⁵⁰ The military equipment unloaded from the MV Leroy A. Mendonca with the assistance of the Greek armed forces included Bradley Fighting Vehicles, M1 Abrams Tanks, Mine Resistant Ambush Protected All-Terrain Vehicles, and Joint Light Tactical Vehicles. US Army, *Port of Alexandroupolis makes sustainment history with heavy brigade movement* (Washington D.C., 17 March 2024), https://www.army.mil/article/274572/port_of_alexandroupolis_makes_sustainment_history_with_heavy_brigade_movement (accessed 24 September 2024).

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² John Sitalides, "How the War in Ukraine Transformed a Quiet Greek Port into a Geopolitical Center", *The National Interest* (online), 01 August 2023, <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/how-war-ukraine-transformed-quiet-greek-port-geopolitical-center-206677> (accessed 18 May 2025).

Türkiye for countering Russia and ensuring stability in the Black Sea. This transformation was sealed with the establishment of the EU Military Assistance Mission in support of Ukraine.⁵³ The Mission's mandate has now been extended for two years until the end of 2026.⁵⁴

In the context of the EU Military Assistance Mission in support of Ukraine, Europe has relied on Greece to serve as an alternative to Türkiye for military supply and logistics for the defence of Ukraine. This confirmed Greece's key strategic location, connecting the Balkans, the Black Sea, Eastern Europe and the Eastern Mediterranean.

When it comes to Washington, the Greek political elites expect President Donald Trump's second term to have a positive influence on Greece-US cooperation for Black Sea security. The port of Alexandroupolis in north-eastern Greece was already a strategic asset for the United States before the Ukraine war, as evidenced by the signing in 2019 – under the first Trump Administration – of the revised Greece-United States Mutual Defense Cooperation Agreement (MDCA). The MDCA confirms that the United States has priority status in Alexandroupolis, for the purpose of “scheduled and emergent requirements, including reception, staging, and onward movement, and other logistics and support activities”.⁵⁵ Athens thus expects the geopolitical value of Alexandroupolis as a southern gateway to the Black Sea and as a transshipment point for American LNG to the Balkans and Eastern Europe to heighten the strategic aspect of Greece-US bilateral relations.

⁵³ European Council, *Council Decision (CFSP) 2022/1968 of 17 October 2022 on a European Union Military Assistance Mission in support of Ukraine (EUMAM Ukraine)* (Brussels, 18 October 2022), <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dec/2022/1968/oj/eng> (accessed 8 November 2024).

⁵⁴ The budget for the EU Military Assistance Mission in support of Ukraine allocated almost €409 million for the two-year period (November 2024–November 2026). The Mission provides military equipment and training to the Ukrainian armed forces. The EU Military Assistance Mission has already trained 63,000 UAF soldiers on EU territory and is scheduled to train another 15,000 troops during 2025. European Council (EC), “Ukraine: Council extends the mandate of the EU Military Assistance Mission for two years”, Press release (Brussels, 08 November 2024), <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2024/11/08/ukraine-council-extends-the-mandate-of-the-eu-military-assistance-mission-for-two-years/> (accessed 8 November 2024).

⁵⁵ Text of the revised Mutual Defense Cooperation Agreement (MDCA), Article 8. Interview with a retired Greek diplomat who requested anonymity, 13 January 2025.

2.3

Greek Perceptions of Türkiye's Eastern Mediterranean Security Policies

The securitisation of Turkish foreign policy was most obvious to Athens in Ankara's "gunboat diplomacy",⁵⁶ which unfolded across the Eastern Mediterranean in the years 2019–2021 in ways that clashed with Greek and European interests.

Türkiye's conduct of seismic surveys in non-delimited maritime areas in the Eastern Mediterranean and its projection of military power in disputed waters led the EU to adopt restrictive measures against Türkiye.⁵⁷ Similarly, after Türkiye and Libya signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) in 2019 on the demarcation of their maritime boundaries and a subsequent MoU in 2022 for joint development of hydrocarbons (that was based on the 2019 MoU), the European Council underscored the illegality of both⁵⁸ on the basis that the 2019 MoU infringes on the sovereign rights of Greece and Cyprus.⁵⁹

Specifically, the European Council conclusions of 2019 stated that the Türkiye-Libya MoU contravened the Law of the Sea,⁶⁰ and was thus legally invalid. The rationale was that the maritime zones of Türkiye and Libya are not adjacent and as such, they have no common maritime border.⁶¹

⁵⁶ Antonia Dimou, "Greece in the Eastern Mediterranean: From Collective Engagement to Action", *Jerusalem Strategic Tribune* (online), May 2022, <https://jstribune.com/dimou-greece-in-the-eastern-mediterranean/> (accessed 23 August 2024).

⁵⁷ The restrictive measures imposed on Türkiye in 2019 in response to its unauthorised drilling activities in the Eastern Mediterranean are still in place. The 2020 European Council (EC) sanctions on two senior executives of the Turkish Petroleum Corporation (TPAO) have been extended until 30 November 2025. "EU prolongs Turkey oil-related sanctions", *eKathimerini* (online), 26 November 2024, <https://www.ekathimerini.com/politics/foreign-policy/1254475/eu-prolongs-turkey-oil-related-sanctions/> (accessed 26 May 2025).

⁵⁸ European Council (EC), *European Council meeting – Conclusions*, EUCO 29/19 (Brussels, 12 December 2019), <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/41768/12-euco-final-conclusions-en.pdf> (accessed 23 August 2024).

⁵⁹ While the Tripoli Court of Appeal ruled to annul the Turkey-Libya MoU in early 2024, the final judgement will have to be made by the Libyan Supreme Court.

Abdul Kader Assad, "Tripoli Court of Appeal annuls MoU in hydrocarbons cooperation with Turkey", *Libya Observer* (online), 19 February 2024, <https://libyaobserver.ly/news/tripoli-court-appeal-annuls-mou-hydrocarbons-cooperation-turkey> (accessed 23 August 2024).

⁶⁰ Türkiye is not a signatory to United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) but applied its provisions in 1986 to proclaim a two-hundred-mile EEZ in the Black Sea.

⁶¹ Nor does the MoU consider the existence of Greek islands in the area and their right to maritime zones under Article 121 of the Law of the Sea. On the other hand, the MoU employs Turkish rocks as base point coordinates to construct the equidistance line, which is a clear violation of international law. Article 121 of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) clearly stipulates that inhabited islands have the same rights as mainland regions to an EEZ and continental shelf, but rocks do not. Rocks are entitled to territorial sea and a contiguous zone, if the coastal state so declares. The United Kingdom, as an island state that has the world's fifth-largest EEZ, is a case in point.

The European Union's position on Türkiye's drilling activities and maritime claims in the Eastern Mediterranean is consistent with its long-term quest for energy security by reducing dependence on Russian energy. The invasion of Ukraine in 2022 accelerated Europe's efforts to diversify its energy supply while it moves towards net zero emissions, specifically by supporting the construction and expansion of infrastructure to supply energy to Europe from this region. Electrical interconnectors like Greece-Egypt (GREGY) and the Great Sea Interconnector (formerly known as EuroAsia Interconnector) will have to pass through maritime areas claimed by Türkiye under the invalid MoU with Libya.⁶²

Türkiye maintains almost 3,000 military personnel in western Libya, under an MoU on security cooperation with the UN-recognised Government of National Unity.⁶³ The agreement foresees military and anti-terrorism training, military planning, and transfer of expertise. A new MoU on the status of Turkish forces stationed in Libya supports the restructuring and training of Libyan military and security forces.⁶⁴

The EU has been at odds with Türkiye over the enforcement of the UN arms embargo on Libya. The European Naval Force Mediterranean Operation Irini (EUNAVFOR MED IRINI) launched in 2020 has seen tensions between the EU and Türkiye, as the latter has repeatedly denied Operation Irini's requests to inspect Turkish vessels. Türkiye's lack of cooperation continues to hamper the EU's efforts to implement the UN embargo.⁶⁵

Türkiye's assertive foreign policy necessitates sustained diplomatic engagement with the EU to defuse tensions over Libya. The core of Europe's policy on Libya is that political stability is a functional prerequisite for the pursuit of energy cooperation and

Maria Gavouneli, *Whose Sea? A Greek International Law Perspective on the Greek-Turkish Disputes* (Paris: Institut Moutaigne, 16 October 2020), <https://www.institutmontaigne.org/en/expressions/whose-sea-greek-international-law-perspective-greek-turkish-disputes> (accessed 23 August 2024).

⁶² "Cyprus: The electrical interconnection with Greece still in limbo – Suspicion, fake news, and those who don't want a solution", *Sofokleous News* (online), 11 September 2024, <https://sofokleous10.gr/2024/09/11/cyprus-the-electrical-interconnection-with-greece-still-in-limbo-suspicion-fake-news-and-those-who-dont-want-a-solution> (accessed 12 September 2024).

⁶³ Of the 3,000 Turkish personnel, 2,000 are soldiers with the Turkish armed forces and around 800 are private military contractors from the Turkish company SADAT. Vassilis Nedos, "Turkey expands grip in Libya", *eKathimerini* (online), 16 November 2024, <https://www.ekathimerini.com/politics/foreign-policy/1253669/turkey-expands-grip-in-libya/> (accessed 1 April 2025).

⁶⁴ The MoU was signed in March 2024 and ratified by the Turkish parliament in August 2024. Levent Kenetz, "Türkiye-Libya agreement grants Turkish forces expansive operational freedoms and legal immunity", *Nordic Monitor* (online), 16 August 2024, <https://nordicmonitor.com/2024/08/Türkiye-libya-agreement-grants-turkish-forces-expansive-operational-freedoms-and-legal-immunity/> (accessed 23 August 2024).

⁶⁵ "Tensions Rise as Türkiye Rejects EU's Request to Inspect Libya-Bound Vessel", *Libya Review* (online), 10 September 2024, <https://libyareview.com/48188/tensions-rise-as-Türkiye-rejects-eus-request-to-inspect-libya-bound-vessel/> (accessed 12 September 2024).

for coordination with the Libyan coastguard and other domestic actors to stop migrant sea crossings.⁶⁶

Overall, the prevailing perception among Greek foreign and security policy elites is that Turkish actions in the Eastern Mediterranean signal divergence rather than convergence of European and Turkish regional policies.

2.4

Greek Perspectives on the Status of the Aegean Islands

Greece regards the delimitation of maritime zones in the Aegean and the Eastern Mediterranean Seas as its only difference with Türkiye. Violations of Greece's maritime sovereignty, Turkish overflights of Greek islands and requests for their demilitarisation have become a significant source of bilateral friction.

The viewpoint of Greece is that Türkiye either ignores the right of the Greek islands to generate maritime zones or propagates myths about their military status. This has been particularly evident in the deliberate mingling of the different regimes pertaining to the eastern Aegean Islands, thus distorting international treaties and their provisions.⁶⁷

Türkiye deliberately misrepresents certain aspects of the Treaty of Lausanne. On numerous occasions, Ankara has even gone as far as calling for revision of the treaty. Specifically, the Treaty of Lausanne requires Greek military forces on the islands of Lesbos, Chios, Samos, and Ikaria to be limited to the regular contingent called up for military service, who can be trained there.⁶⁸ It also requires the numbers of gendarmerie and police to be proportional to the gendarmerie and police of Greece as a whole. Türkiye is the only country that has violated the Treaty of Lausanne's no-fly provisions for the four Greek islands.

⁶⁶ European Council (EC), *Minutes – European Council meeting (24 and 25 June 2021)*, EUCO 39/24 (Brussels, 21 October 2024), <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-39-2024-INIT/en/pdf> (accessed 21 October 2024).

⁶⁷ The status of Greek islands in the Eastern Aegean is governed by three international treaties. The islands of Lesbos, Chios, Samos, and Ikaria fall under the Treaty of Lausanne of 1923. The status of the Dodecanese islands is governed by the 1947 Paris Peace Treaty, and that of the islands of Lemnos and Samothrace by the 1936 Montreux Convention.

⁶⁸ Article 13 of the Treaty of Lausanne governs the status of the islands of Mytilene, Chios, Samos and Ikaria. World War I Primary Document Archive, *Treaty of Peace with Turkey Signed at Lausanne, July 24, 1923*, (last edited 20 May 2009), https://www.lib.byu.edu/index.php/Treaty_of_Lausanne (accessed 26 July 2024).

The military status of the islands of Lemnos and Samothrace under the Montreux Convention of 1936 has been recognised by Türkiye for decades. When the Montreux Treaty was ratified, Foreign Minister Tefvik Rüştü Aras, speaking in the Turkish National Assembly, unreservedly acknowledged Greece's legal right to deploy troops on Lemnos and Samothrace.⁶⁹

The Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe permits the presence of the Greek National Guard on the Dodecanese islands. Greece rejects the Turkish position on their demilitarisation – which invokes the 1947 Paris Peace Treaty – for two reasons. Firstly, Türkiye is not a signatory to the Paris Peace Treaty. As a third state, it has no rights or obligations, as confirmed by article 89 of the said Treaty.⁷⁰

Second, Greece has the right to defend the Dodecanese islands, in accordance with Article 51 of the UN Charter, which grants UN member states the right to self-defence against armed attack or threat of use of force. Greece bases its right to defend itself against Turkish aggression on Article 51, noting the threat of use of force implicit in Türkiye's 1995 declaration of *casus belli*. The Greek position is that Türkiye's demands for demilitarisation of the Dodecanese islands are inconsistent with the right of self-defence.

Turkish policy towards Greece's northern neighbours like Albania, Kosovo and North Macedonia, and southern neighbours like Libya, creates a feeling of encirclement. Greek foreign policy and security elites perceive the Türkiye-Libya Memorandum of Understanding on Delimitation of Maritime Boundaries as violation of Greece's sovereign rights, depriving the island of Crete of its maritime zones. Athens also regards Türkiye's argument that Greek islands cannot create maritime zones in the Aegean Sea because it is semi-enclosed as inconsistent with Ankara's regional policies and its use of the equidistance method to define its EEZ with the former Soviet Union in the semi-enclosed Black Sea.⁷¹ To reinforce its position that Aegean islands are entitled to maritime zones, Greece points out that it has 3,100 islands of which approximately 2,400 are in the Aegean Sea. By comparison, Türkiye has only

⁶⁹ Turkish Foreign Minister Rustu Aras said in his address to the Turkish National Assembly on 31 July 1936: "the provisions pertaining to the islands of Limnos and Samothrace, which belong to our neighbor and friendly country Greece and were demilitarized in application of the 1923 Lausanne Treaty, were also abolished by the new Montreux Treaty, which gives us great pleasure". Türkiye approved the Montreux convention's provisions that apply within and beyond its territories. Antonia Dimou, "Türkiye's groundless claims for Greek islands in the Aegean", *Modern Diplomacy* (online), 15 December 2020, <https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2020/12/15/Turkiyes-groundless-claims-for-greek-islands-in-the-aegean/> (accessed 10 July 2024).

⁷⁰ United Nations (UN), *Convention on the Law of Treaties: Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties 1969 Done at Vienna on 23 May 1969*, Treaty Series, vol. 1155 (2005), https://legal.un.org/ilc/texts/instruments/english/conventions/1_1_1969.pdf (accessed 10 July 2024).

⁷¹ In 1986 Türkiye unilaterally proclaimed a two-hundred-mile EEZ in the Black Sea in accordance with UNCLOS – which Ankara paradoxically never signed. Theodore Karyotis, *The Ordeal of the Greek EEZ* (Athens: Institute of Energy for South-East Europe, 05 January 2021), <https://www.iene.eu/the-ordeal-of-the-greek-eez-p6076.html> (accessed 11 July 2024).

three islands in the Aegean. Athens also argues that Türkiye deliberately ignores Greece's islands, whose coastline (added to that of the mainland) brings Greece's total to 15,655 kilometres as opposed to Türkiye's 8,368 kilometres. Athens argues that international institutions back up the Greek position, given that Greece has a significantly longer coastline than Türkiye no matter how it is measured.⁷²

Greece sees a possibility to resolve its disputes with Türkiye regarding the continental shelf and Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) maritime delimitations in accordance with customary international law, which is also binding on states – like Türkiye – that are not signatories to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). Greece advocates direct dialogue or the signing by Greece and Türkiye of an arbitration agreement to appeal to the International Court of Justice or another international tribunal.

2.5

Military Comparisons Between Greece and Türkiye

Greece and Türkiye are NATO allies and are engaged in a longstanding and complex relationship of military escalation and political rapprochement. Athens and Ankara came close to military confrontation in 1987 over oil exploration in the disputed continental shelf in the Aegean Sea.⁷³ In 1995, the Turkish National Assembly adopted a resolution authorising military action should Greece extend its territorial waters to twelve nautical miles, as per UNCLOS.⁷⁴

The mutual threat perceptions in the Aegean and the Mediterranean have led to an arms race to enhance military capabilities on the land, at sea, and in the air. A comparison of military capabilities in 2025 shows that: Greece has 178 fighter aircraft against Türkiye's 201; Greece has 15 military transport aircraft as opposed to Türkiye's 84; Greece has 81 trainer aircraft compared to Türkiye's 287; and Greece has

⁷² The World Resources Institute and CIA's World Factbook list the length of the Greek coastline as 13,676 kilometres, compared to Türkiye's 7,200 kilometres (including the Black Sea). Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), *Coastline*, The World Factbook, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/field/coastline/> (accessed 10 July 2024).

⁷³ Pavlos Papadopoulos, "The US assessment of the Greek-Turkish Crisis of 1987", *eKathimerini* (online), 28 March 2022, <https://www.ekathimerini.com/opinion/1180777/when-greece-mulled-joining-the-warsaw-pact/> (accessed 26 July 2024).

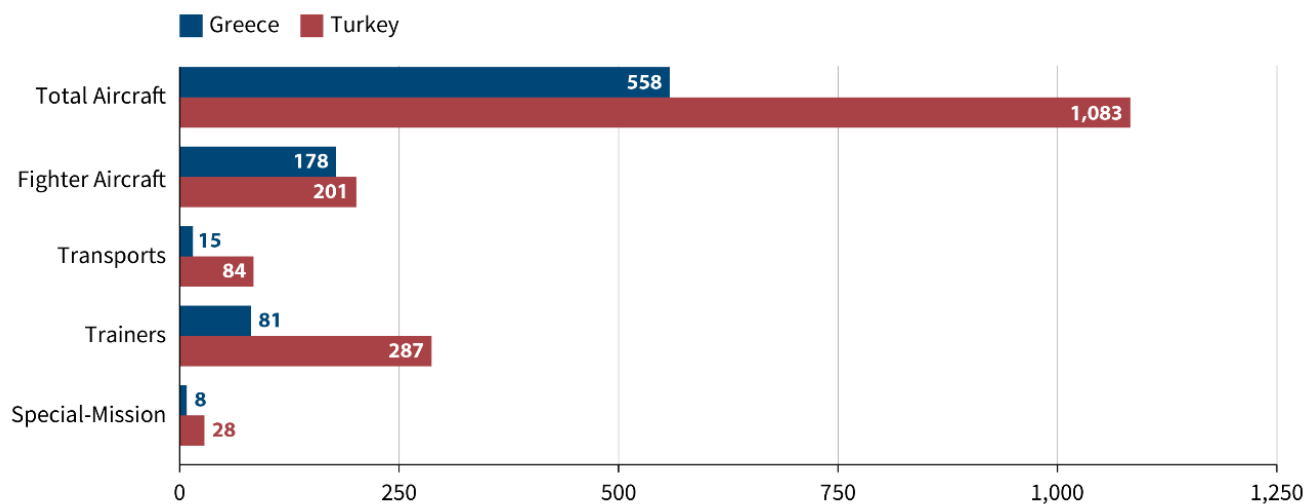
⁷⁴ The Turkish National Assembly's resolution constituted a reaction to the declaration by Greece (after ratifying the Convention of the Law of the Sea through Law No. 2321/1995) that it reserves the right to exercise its sovereign right at any time to extend its territorial waters to twelve nautical miles. United Nations (UN) Digital Library, *Letter dated 9 June 1995 from the Permanent Representative of Greece to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General* (12 June 1995), <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/182239?ln=en&v=pdf> (accessed 26 July 2024).

8 special mission aircraft as opposed to Türkiye's 28. Overall, Greece has 558 warplanes against Türkiye's 1,083.⁷⁵

Figure 1

Comparison of Greek and Turkish Military Strength: Air Power

In assets



Source: GlobalFirepower (GFP Index)

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Greece's strategy centres on maintaining qualitative rather than quantitative air superiority. To this end, Greece acquired 24 French Rafale fighter jets as of January 2025, with the option of another 12.⁷⁶ In addition, 84 Greek F-16 fighter jets are expected to be upgraded to the Viper configuration by 2027. Twenty of the anticipated 84 upgraded F-16 fighter jets have already been delivered to the Greek Air Force.⁷⁷ Greece has also ordered 20 F-35A Lightning IIs, with the first batch to be delivered by 2028. By contrast, Türkiye has been removed from the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter programme due to its acquisition of the Russian S-400 surface-to-air defence system and related concerns over the possibility of Russia gathering intelligence on the F-35's stealth capabilities.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ "Comparison of Greece and Türkiye Military Strengths (2025)", *GlobalFirepower (GFP Index)* (online) https://www.globalfirepower.com/countries-comparison-detail.php?country1=greece&country2=turkey#google_vignette (accessed 05 April 2025).

⁷⁶ Stavros Ioannides, "Greece to begin receiving last batch of Rafales in September", *eKathimerini* (online), 04 September 2024, <https://www.ekathimerini.com/politics/foreign-policy/1247736/greece-to-start-receiving-last-batch-of-rafales-in-september/> (accessed 4 September 2024).

⁷⁷ "Hellenic Air Force receives 20th upgraded F-16 Viper", *eKathimerini* (online), 03 July 2024, <https://www.ekathimerini.com/politics/foreign-policy/1243082/hellenic-air-force-receives-20th-upgraded-f-16-viper/> (accessed 26 July 2024).

⁷⁸ The US Congress imposed sanctions on Türkiye prohibiting the transfer of F-35 fighter jets as long as Türkiye possesses the S-400 surface-to-air defence system. US Congress, *FY2020 National Defense Authorization Act, NDAA, Section 1245, P.L. 116-92* (Washington D.C., 20 December 2019), <https://www.congress.gov/116/plaws/publ92/PLAW-116publ92.pdf> (accessed 26 July 2024).

Türkiye will, however, acquire 40 new American F-16 fighter jets, and 79 F-16s it already owns will be upgraded.⁷⁹ This is a result of the protracted negotiations that made Türkiye's ratification of Sweden's NATO membership⁸⁰ conditional on the sale and upgrade of F-16s, in combination with Ankara's acceptance of a rider to the US National Defense Authorisation Act of 2023 cautioning NATO allies against "unauthorized territorial overflights of another NATO ally's airspace" (which was an implicit reference to Türkiye).⁸¹

Over the last decade, proposed American arms transfers to Türkiye have been frozen or subject to congressional delays, prompting Ankara to look into alternatives like the Eurofighter Typhoon despite the major technical and political obstacles involved. The biggest obstacles are the technical difficulties involved in adapting to a non-F-16 platform and the fact that Eurofighters include parts of US origin that require congressional review and approval.

When it comes to naval power, Greece has 192 naval vessels as opposed to Türkiye's 182. They break down as follows: 13 Greek frigates compared to 17 Turkish, 39 Greek patrol vessels compared to 41 Turkish, 7 Greek mine/countermine vessels compared to 11 Turkish. The fact that Türkiye is now building its own corvettes, along with its recent acquisition of the German-built T-214 submarine with an air-independent propulsion system, has prompted Greece to prioritise the enhancement of its naval capabilities.⁸² To this end, Greece is scheduled to acquire four new French-built defence and intervention frigates. Athens also plans to upgrade the electronics of its MEKO frigates and acquire new corvettes post-2030.⁸³

⁷⁹ "Türkiye Signs Deal with US to Buy F-16 Warplanes", *Defense Post* (online), 13 June 2024, <https://thedefensepost.com/2024/06/13/Türkiye-us-f16-deal/> (accessed 26 July 2024).

⁸⁰ Ezgi Akin, "Türkiye receives US draft letter approving F-16 sale", *Al Monitor* (online), 29 February 2024, <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2024/02/Türkiye-receives-us-draft-letter-approving-f-16-sale> (accessed 10 July 2024).

⁸¹ US House of Representatives, *Joint Explanatory Statement to Accompany the James M. Inhofe National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2023*, (Washington D.C., 05 December 2022) <https://docs.house.gov/billsthisweek/20221205/BILLS-117HR7776EAS-RCP117-70-JES.pdf> (accessed 25 May 2025).

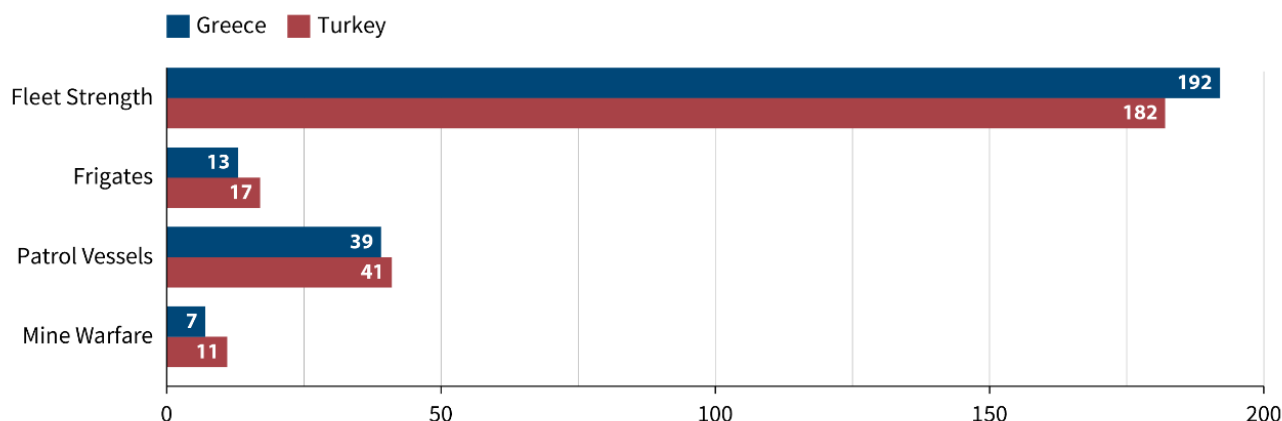
⁸² The Turkish Navy possesses twelve attack submarines: four Ay-class (Type 209/1200), four Preveze-class (Type 209T/1400), and four Gür-class (Type 209T2/1400). Türkiye is expected to be operating six Reis-class AIP submarines by 2027. The Greek Navy has eleven submarines of Types 209/1100, 209/1200, and 214. Tayfun Ozberk, "Turkish Navy launches the 2nd Reis-class (Type 214TN) AIP submarine", *Naval News* (online), 25 May 2023, <https://www.navalnews.com/naval-news/2023/05/turkish-navy-launched-the-second-reis-class-type-214tn-aip-submarine/> (accessed 10 July 2024).

⁸³ Vasilis Nedos, "Arms race with Türkiye a Sisyphean trial", *eKathimerini* (online), 09 September 2024, <https://www.ekathimerini.com/politics/foreign-policy/1248058/arms-race-with-Türkiye-a-sisyphean-trial/> (accessed 20 September 2024).

Figure 2

Comparison of Greek and Turkish Military Strength: Naval Power

In assets



Source: GlobalFirepower (GFP Index)

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Regarding land power, Greece has 1,344 tanks compared to Türkiye's 2,238. It has 61,888 armoured vehicles against Türkiye's 61,173, 589 self-propelled howitzers against Türkiye's 1,038, and 152 mobile rocket launchers compared to Türkiye's 296.⁸⁴

Adapting to the challenges of the evolving military landscape, Greece has developed its first combat drones, with scaled production expected to commence in 2025. The Archytas drone is designed to perform reconnaissance and surveillance operations over the Greek islands in the Aegean Sea, while the Grypas drone is designed to fulfil complex military mission requirements.⁸⁵ Türkiye already produces the Bayraktar surveillance and attack drones that have been employed in Ukraine and an export model is sold to various armed forces.

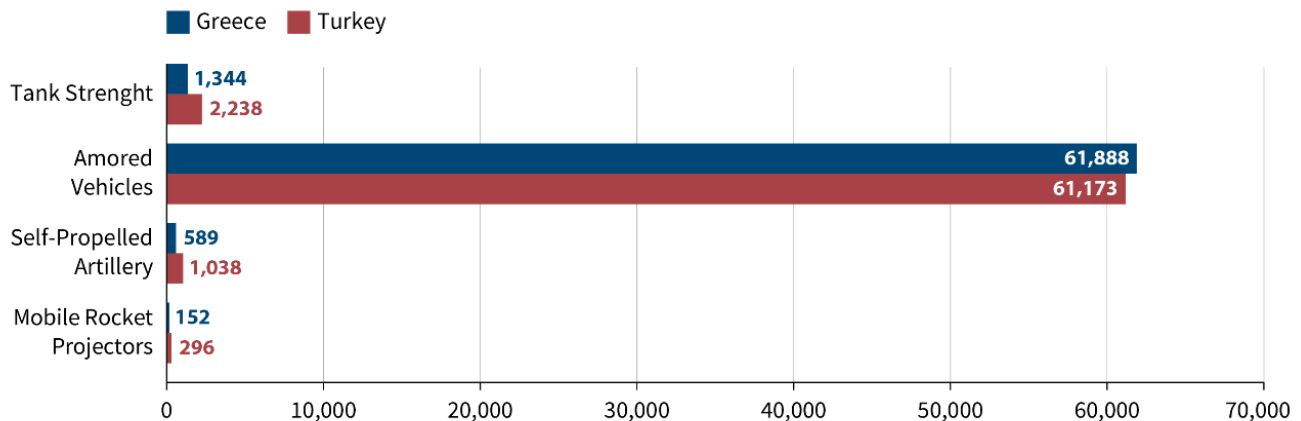
⁸⁴ "Comparison of Greece and Türkiye Military Strengths (2025)", op. cit.

⁸⁵ Elizabeth Gosselin-Malo, "Greece builds first locally made combat drone", *Defense News* (online), 24 January 2023, <https://www.defensenews.com/unmanned/2023/01/24/greece-builds-first-locally-made-combat-drone/> (accessed 10 July 2024).

Figure 3

Comparison of Greek and Turkish Military Strength: Land Power

In assets



Source: GlobalFirepower (GFP Index)

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In line with its strategy of enhancing its military power, Türkiye has developed an indigenous missile programme. Its core is the Tayfun short-range ballistic missile with a range of almost 560 kilometres. Tayfun's successful test over the Black Sea region, combined with Turkish public statements and maps indicating that its range covers all of Greece,⁸⁶ have prompted Athens to redefine its air and missile defences with the deployment of the €2.8 billion "Achilles Shield" that is scheduled to be operational by 2027.⁸⁷ "Achilles Shield" is a five-layered, integrated air defence system that encompasses anti-tactical-ballistic, anti-air, anti-ship, anti-submarine, and anti-drone measures. To build the "Achilles Shield", Greece plans to procure the Barak MX system from Israel whose interceptors cover a range of 35 to 150 kilometres, providing protection against drones, aircraft, and cruise missiles.⁸⁸

In its quest to defend the Aegean islands, Greece has procured the Spike fire-and-forget anti-tank and anti-personnel missile system from Israel.⁸⁹ Specifically, Greece intends to use the Spike system, which has a range of 30 kilometres, to defend the

⁸⁶ Athens Bureau, "Turkish media presents new map: Tayfun's new range covers all of Greece", *Greek City Times* (online), <https://greekcitytimes.com/2022/12/20/turkish-media-tayfun-new-range/> (accessed 10 July 2024).

⁸⁷ "Exclusive: Greece Launches €2.8 Billion 'Achilles Shield' Project to Build National Air Defense System", *Defense News* (online), 05 April 2025, <https://armyrecognition.com/news/army-news/2025/exclusive-greece-launches-2-8-billion-achilles-shield-project-to-build-national-air-defense-system> (accessed 24 May 2025).

⁸⁸ "Greece in talks with Israel's IAI over Barak air defence systems under Achilles Shield plan", *Defense Industry Europe* (online), 05 April 2025, <https://defence-industry.eu/greece-in-talks-with-israels-iai-over-barak-air-defence-systems-under-achilles-shield-plan/> (accessed 24 May 2025).

⁸⁹ "Greece purchases SPIKE missiles in 370 million euro deal", *Asia Pacific Defense Reporter* (online), 12 April 2023, <https://asiapacificdefencereporter.com/greece-purchases-spike-missiles-in-370-million-euro-deal/> (accessed 10 July 2014).

Greek islands and the land border in Evros.⁹⁰ In early April 2025, Greece unveiled a new 12-year defence spending programme valued at €26–28 billion, to transform its armed forces for hi-tech warfare with “AI-powered missile systems, drone technologies and advanced command units”.⁹¹ Emphasis is placed on next-generation soldier equipment with sensors and communication systems, and the development of satellite capabilities for secure communications. The “Achilles Shield” air defence system will combine existing components like the Patriot system with cutting-edge technologies to protect the Greek islands and mainland against multiple threats.⁹² Achilles Shield is based on a cost-effective network of concealed and AI-guided missile systems, under unified command and control, practically sealing the transformation of the Greek defence deterrence doctrine.⁹³

Greece enhances its defence capabilities, upgrades and modernises its defence equipment, and reforms its armed forces in order to maintain a credible deterrent against any potential provocation by Türkiye. Türkiye’s maximalist Blue Homeland (Mavi Vatan) concept, which claims large parts of the Aegean and Mediterranean, including Greek maritime zones, rings alarm bells in Greece. Once an idea countenanced only by a few anti-Western Turkish naval officers, Blue Homeland has become a state aspiration and has been incorporated into the new Turkish state curriculum, “The Century of Türkiye”.⁹⁴ Its textbooks underscore the Blue Homeland’s incorporation of maritime areas that fall either under the responsibility of Türkiye in accordance with international law or under Turkish interests within the envisioned territorial boundaries of the 1920 National Oath (known as *Misak-ı Milli*) for the future Turkish Republic, which encompasses areas like Western Thrace and the Dodecanese.⁹⁵ Moreover, Athens argues that the Turkish naval exercises conducted periodically in the Black Sea, the Aegean, and the Eastern Mediterranean combine power projection with naval diplomacy and demonstrate Ankara’s politico-military regional agenda for the coming years.

⁹⁰ Athens Bureau, “Greece will place powerful Spike missiles on the border with Türkiye”, *Greek City Times* (online), 03 October 2023, <https://greekcitytimes.com/2023/10/03/greece-spike-missiles-Türkiye> (accessed 10 July 2014).

⁹¹ Derek Gatopoulos, “Greece vows \$27B on defense overhaul centered on high-tech warfare”, *Defense News*, 03 April 2025, <https://www.defensenews.com/global/europe/2025/04/02/greece-vows-27b-on-defense-overhaul-centered-on-high-tech-warfare/> (accessed 05 April 2025).

⁹² Tassos Kokkinidis, “Greece’s ‘Achilles’ Shield’: Building a Multi-Layered Defense for the 21st Century”, *Greek Reporter* (online), 03 April 2025, <https://greekreporter.com/2025/04/03/greece-achilles-shield-defense-program/> (accessed 04 April 2025).

⁹³ Athens-Macedonia News Agency (AMNA), “Defence Min Dendias highlights new deterrence doctrine and Armed Forces reforms”, 21 March 2025, <https://www.amna.gr/mobile/articleen/892111/Defence-Min-Dendias-highlights-new-deterrence-doctrine-and-Armed-Forces-reforms> (accessed 10 September 2024).

⁹⁴ The Blue Homeland doctrine is taught in the 9th grade geography textbooks for Turkish high schools. Manolis Kostides, “‘Blue Homeland’ debuts at Turkish schools”, *eKathimerini* (online), 03 September 2024, <https://www.ekathimerini.com/politics/foreign-policy/1248308/blue-homeland-debuts-at-turkish-schools/> (accessed 10 September 2014).

⁹⁵ Sinan Baykent, “Misak-ı Millî or the ‘National Oath’: Türkiye’s new foreign policy compass?”, *Hurriyet Daily News* (online), 30 October 2016, <https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/misak-i-mill-or-the-national-oath-Türkiyes-new-foreign-policy-compass-105529> (accessed 10 September 2024).

2.6

Greek Public Perceptions of Türkiye

The Greek public's views on bilateral and multilateral relations with Türkiye have evolved since 2020. Five parallel opinion surveys were conducted in Greece and Türkiye during the period between 2021 and 2023.⁹⁶

Attitudes on certain issues have been affected by the 2020 downturn in Greek–Turkish relations, and the 2023 earthquake in Türkiye. The five surveys reveal a shared belief that the Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean represent the crux of the bilateral dispute. Specifically, in November 2021, 58.1 per cent of Greek respondents and 66.7 per cent of Turkish respondents identified the Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean as the most serious problem between Greece and Türkiye. A year later in November 2022, the figure for Greek respondents increased to 64.9 per cent while the figure for Turkish respondents decreased to 57.3 per cent.⁹⁷

Public concerns about the possibility of a “hot incident” (a military clash of limited geographical scope) declined between 2021 and 2023 in both countries. In 2021, 70.2 per cent of Greek respondents and 41.9 per cent of Turkish respondents were concerned about a “hot incident”. The figures for 2022 were similar: 66.9 per cent of Greeks and 44.2 per cent of Turks. The Greek concern was attributable to the naval tensions caused by Türkiye deploying vessels to conduct seismic surveys in disputed areas in the Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean, which prompted Greece to place itself on military alert. Worry on both sides fell in 2023 when only 55.5 per cent of Greeks and 25.2 per cent of Turks were concerned about a “hot incident” that could evolve into a broader bilateral military conflict.

The change in political attitudes in both countries was triggered by the so-called earthquake diplomacy after the destructive 2023 earthquake in Türkiye. It affected public perceptions, confirming that any improvement in political relations prompts public attitudes to follow suit. Interestingly, significant numbers in both countries believe that improving bilateral relations should be a priority of both governments;

⁹⁶ The five joint surveys were conducted by the polling companies MRB (in Greece) and KONDA (in Türkiye), in collaboration with the Istanbul Policy Center and two Greek research institutes, diaNEOsis and ELIAMEP, as research partners.

Vasilis Nedos, “Survey charts opinions of Greeks, Turks on politics, bilateral relations”, *eKathimerini* (online), 15 May 2021, <https://www.ekathimerini.com/news/1161135/survey-charts-opinions-of-greeks-turks-on-politics-relations/> (accessed 26 July 2024).

⁹⁷ Evren Balta, Ioannis N. Grigoriadis *The Evolution of Public Opinion in Greece and Türkiye (2021–2023): Dynamics and Shifts in Comparative Perspective* (Athens: Hellenic Foundation for European & Foreign Policy [ELIAMEP], 18 January 2024), <https://www.eliamep.gr/en/i-exelixi-tis-koinis-gnomis-stin-ellada-kai-stin-tourkia-2021-2023-dynamikes-kai-metavoles-se-sygkritiki-prooptiki/> (accessed 26 July 2024).

this view was shared by 48.3 per cent of the Greek respondents and 43.4 per cent of the Turkish respondents.

As far as options for enhancing bilateral relations and ultimately resolving differences are concerned, the surveys found the following: In November 2022, 46.2 per cent of Greeks and 53.4 per cent of Turks advocated strengthening diplomatic and political ties; the figures were largely the same in July 2023 with 41.9 per cent of Greeks and 61.4 per cent of Turks supporting such moves. Diplomatic and military sanctions as vehicle to improve bilateral relations were supported by 30.2 per cent of Greeks and 19.5 per cent of Turks surveyed in November 2022, and 20.6 per cent of Greeks and 13.3 per cent of Turks in July 2023.

The perception that military and diplomatic sanctions can advance bilateral relations has been boosted by the noted effectiveness of the American sanctions on Türkiye under CAATSA and the EU's restrictive measures in response to Türkiye's unauthorised drilling activities in the Eastern Mediterranean. In Greek and Turkish public opinion, Western sanctions are regarded as an effective mechanism that pushed Türkiye to abandon its collision course with Greece and adopt a policy of rapprochement to ease tensions in the Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean.

Perceptions of Türkiye's position in the European Union and in the transatlantic security architecture remained constant over the period in question. This is evidenced by persistent scepticism over the EU's supposedly unfair support for the respective other side. Specifically, 53.7 per cent of Greeks and 64.0 per cent of Turks believe that the EU provides unconditional and unfair support to Türkiye or Greece respectively.

Euroscepticism seems to prevail in Greece and Türkiye. The third joint survey in May 2022 found that 31.5 per cent of the Greeks and 46.7 per cent of Turks perceived the EU's global role as highly negative.⁹⁸ Yet, despite public mistrust in the EU, a majority of the Turkish public supports Türkiye's accession to the EU. The Greek public, on the other hand, mostly disagrees with that prospect. Euroscepticism is, however, more prevalent in Türkiye than in Greece, especially concerning the role of international organisations like the EU in resolving Greek-Turkish disagreements. Specifically, 39.1 per cent of Greek respondents in November 2022 favoured a larger role for the EU in resolving bilateral differences, as opposed to a mere 6.1 per cent of Turkish respondents. This trend remained constant through 2023, when 37.1 per cent of Greeks and 7.7 per cent of Turks favoured a European mediating role.⁹⁹

⁹⁸ The third joint survey was conducted during the first ten days of May 2022, before Turkish President Erdoğan's verbal attack on the Greek prime minister. Hellenic Foundation for European & Foreign Policy (ELIAMEP), *Third Public Opinion Survey in Greece and Türkiye* (Athens: 18 June 2022), <https://www.eliamep.gr/en/triti-koini-dimoskopisi-ellados-tourkias> (accessed 26 July 2024).

⁹⁹ Evren Balta, Ioannis N. Grigoriadis, 2024.

Long-standing differences in the Aegean and Mediterranean have limited public support for NATO's role in European security, despite the military contributions of both Greece and Türkiye to the Alliance. Greek and Turkish public perceptions about NATO were negative regarding its mediating role in resolving differences between Greece and Türkiye. Specifically, 29.1 per cent of Greeks and 30.2 per cent of Turks in the joint surveys conducted in 2021 and 2023 have a negative perception about a mediating role by NATO despite the Alliance's significant military contribution to Ukraine following Russia's invasion. Interestingly, 43.2 per cent of Greeks and 47.3 per cent of Turkish respondents in the third joint survey – conducted three months after the invasion of Ukraine – viewed NATO's global role negatively.¹⁰⁰

The five joint surveys reveal the degree to which political affiliation affects public opinion. In Greece, right-leaning respondents tend to be more wary about the prospects of resolving Greek-Turkish differences, while those in the centre and left-of-centre are more open to the idea. The effect of political affiliation is stronger in Türkiye, where nationalism is embraced by the Justice and Development Party (AKP) and the ultra-nationalist Nationalist Action Party (MHP), for example regarding the Aegean Sea as exclusively Turkish.

In line with public attitudes, the governments of Greece and Türkiye have committed to promote peaceful coexistence and to resolve their bilateral differences through dialogue. Although not legally binding, the Athens Declaration on Friendly Relations and Good-Neighbourliness has served to outline the parameters of better relations and military de-escalation in the Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean.¹⁰¹ These include Political Dialogue, the Positive Agenda, and Confidence Building Measures (CBMs).¹⁰²

CBMs centre on measures in the military field to eliminate tensions and risks and build mutual trust. CBMs between the defence ministries have brought relative calm to the Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean. Violations of Greek airspace have decreased sharply,¹⁰³ with only 21 flights over inhabited Greek islands reported as of January of

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Prime Minister's Office, Hellenic Republic, *Athens Declaration on Friendly Relations and Good-Neighbourliness*, (Athens, 07 December 2023), <https://www.primeminister.gr/en/2023/12/07/33195> (accessed 26 July 2024).

¹⁰² The Political Dialogue focusses on matters of mutual interest and exploratory talks. The Positive Agenda involves a Joint Action Plan for cooperation in the areas of business/economy, tourism, transportation, energy, innovation, science and technology, agriculture, environmental protection, social security and health, youth, and education. The Positive Agenda's aim is to produce concrete outcomes that will advance its content and promote constructive dialogue between Türkiye and Greece. The Positive Agenda was launched in 2021 to enhance cooperation between Greece and Türkiye on concrete issues. A series of meetings to discuss a joint action plan within the scope of the "Positive Agenda" have been taking place since the beginning of 2021, aiming to promote economic, trade, and business cooperation between Greece and Türkiye.
Ibid.

¹⁰³ European Commission (EC), *Key findings of the 2023 Report on Türkiye* (Brussels, 08 November 2023), https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/qanda_23_5630 (accessed 27 July 2024).

2023.¹⁰⁴ No national airspace violations, no overflights of national territory, and no “armed violating formations” were reported during the period from January to September 2024 (although there were 127 infringements of Air Traffic Regulations of the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) by a total of 98 aircraft).¹⁰⁵ Those infringements involved Turkish unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) and maritime patrol aircraft but not fighter jets.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ Hellenic National Defence General Staff, *2023 Aggregate Incidents Data*, <https://geetha.mil.gr/en/violations/violations-of-national-airspace-infringements-of-air-traffic-regulations-icao/2023-aggregate-incidents-data/> (accessed 10 July 2024).

¹⁰⁵ Hellenic National Defence General Staff, *2024 Aggregate Incidents Data*, <https://geetha.mil.gr/en/violations/violations-of-national-airspace-infringements-of-air-traffic-regulations-icao/2024-aggregate-incidents-data/> (accessed 02 October 2024).

¹⁰⁶ The Turkish UAV flights are classed as “Athens Flight Information Region (FIR) violations”. The reason is that despite requesting permission from the Greek Civil Aviation Authority for every UAV flight, Türkiye refuses either to comply with the regulations regarding the 10-nautical-mile Greek airspace or to submit a flight plan.

Stavros Ioannides, “Greece records 106 airspace violations by Turkish drones and aircraft since August”, *eKathimerini* (online), 25 October 2024, <https://www.ekathimerini.com/politics/foreign-policy/1251957/greece-records-over-106-airspace-violations-by-turkish-drones-and-aircraft-since-august/> (accessed 25 October 2024).

3.

Conclusions and Policy Recommendations

Türkiye pursues strategic autonomy, seeking the capacity to promote its national interests in different geopolitical regions. The war in Ukraine has increased uncertainty in global and regional economies and energy supply chains and accelerated the move towards a new multipolar order where Türkiye represents an emerging middle power. In that context of global multipolarity, Türkiye is increasingly pursuing a transactional foreign policy with the aim of maintaining its national identity and solidifying its regional interests. Türkiye is expected to continue providing diplomatic and economic support for Ukraine without alienating Russia, given that the Russia-Ukraine conflict has benefitted Ankara strategically due to control of access to the Black Sea and economically due to robust trade with Russia and drone sales to Ukraine.

Türkiye faces challenges in key dimensions of its foreign policy, namely relations with the United States, NATO, and the EU. Despite Turkish-NATO relations being highly valued, Türkiye has experienced friction with its NATO allies, while veering closer to Russia. Türkiye's decision to proceed with its purchase of the Russian S-400 air defence system has caused concern among NATO members over the implications for the Alliance's interoperability.¹⁰⁷ Some NATO members also believe that Türkiye's delay in approving Swedish accession endangered the Alliance's unity. As it navigates multipolarity, Türkiye may become the first NATO member and EU membership candidate to join the Chinese-led BRICS.¹⁰⁸

Undoubtedly, the instability associated with multipolarity fosters security-oriented thinking and practice. Despite concerns over Turkish ties with Russia, Türkiye's rapprochement with Greece and support for Ukraine have positively affected Ankara's relations with the United States and the EU. The de-escalation of tensions with Greece

¹⁰⁷ This is because the S-400 is not compatible with NATO assets in Türkiye and must therefore operate on a standalone basis. NATO members that have purchased F-35 Joint Strike Fighters also worried about the possibility of technology data of fifth-generation jets being transferred from Ankara to Moscow. Antonia Dimou, "Turkey drifts away from the West", *Modern Diplomacy* (online), 05 March 2018, <https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2018/03/05/Türkiye-drifts-away-west> (accessed 10 July 2024).

¹⁰⁸ Omair Anas, "Türkiye and BRICS: Step toward more multipolar future", *Daily Sabah* (online), 14 October 2024, <https://www.dailysabah.com/opinion/op-ed/turkiye-and-brics-step-toward-more-multipolar-future> (accessed 14 October 2024).

and the resumption of Greek-Turkish political dialogue were decisive factors leading to American congressional approval for the F-16 programme to modernise Türkiye's aging air force, thereby reinforcing NATO's southern flank.

Türkiye seeks to enhance bilateral relations with the new Trump administration and step up its security and foreign policy engagement, given the continuation of the Russia-Ukraine war and additional geopolitical conflicts emerging in the broader Middle East. As the Turkish President has confirmed, Türkiye has sought to mediate in the Russia-Ukraine conflict to support President Trump's initiative to end the war.¹⁰⁹ Despite initial Turkish optimism, Washington chose Saudi Arabia to host face-to-face meetings between US officials and the Ukrainian and Russian negotiating teams.¹¹⁰ Saudi Arabia has also become a central venue for Arab League Summits on the future of Gaza and the conflict in Sudan. As the diplomatic situation evolves, Türkiye seems to have little prospect of achieving its desired role as a primary mediator in either the Russia-Ukraine or the Gaza conflict. For the latter, Türkiye's irrelevance is attributed to the fact that President Erdoğan has alienated Israel and embraced a strong pro-Hamas rhetoric.¹¹¹ Türkiye is, however, gaining traction in the Middle East for three main reasons: first, its growing military-industrial capacity, including its widely exported Bayraktar TB2 armed drones; second, its ability to deploy hard power; and third, its willingness to "play hardball with the big powers", in particular the United States.

Despite the rocky state of US-Turkey relations, the American and Turkish presidents maintain a strong personal relationship. That was instrumental in preventing relations from collapsing completely during the first Trump administration.¹¹² The personal relationship between the two leaders is said to facilitate a Turkish role in Ukraine and Syria (alongside Ankara's general military and geographical advantages) and to assist in lessening tensions between Türkiye and its immediate and wider neighbours, like Greece and Israel.¹¹³ In the American calculus, a *modus operandi* between Türkiye and neighbouring countries will enable a Turkish contribution to the security architecture of the Middle East and Europe. The Greek-Turkish

¹⁰⁹ Olena Goncharova, "Erdoğan tells Trump that Turkey supports US efforts to end Russia's war", *Kyiv Independent* (online), 17 March 2025, <https://kyivindependent.com/erdogan-tells-trump-that-turkey-supports-us-efforts-to-end-russias-war-against-ukraine/> (accessed 08 April 2025).

¹¹⁰ Jennifer Holleis and Majda Bouazza, "Saudi Arabia rebrands as mediator for global crises", *Deutsche Welle* (DW) (online), 10 March 2025, <https://www.dw.com/en/saudi-arabia-rebrands-as-mediator-for-global-crises/a-71875311> (accessed 05 April 2025).

¹¹¹ Smadar Perry, "Erdoğan's embrace of Hamas and anti-Israel rhetoric fuel regional concerns", *Y Net News* (online), 04 March 2025, <https://www.ynetnews.com/article/bygeevq6jl> (accessed 05 April 2025).

¹¹² Gibbs McKinley and Kate Johnston, *Trump and Erdogan Have The Chance To Reset U.S.-Turkey Relations* (Washington D.C.: Center for a New American Security, 10 February 2025), <https://www.cnas.org/publications/commentary/trump-and-erdogan-have-the-chance-to-reset-u-s-turkey-relations> (accessed 30 March 2025).

¹¹³ Lazar Berman, "Trump says he can mediate between Israel and Turkey, has a great relationship with Erdoğan", *Times of Israel* (online), 07 April 2025, https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog_entry/trump-says-he-can-mediate-between-israel-and-turkey-has-a-great-relationship-with-erdogan/ (accessed 07 April 2025).

rapprochement has notably paved the way for joint participation in defence initiatives that fortify Europe and NATO against future military aggression. It is in this context that Greece and Türkiye joined the German-led European Sky Shield Initiative (ESSI),¹¹⁴ which aims to promote joint procurement and interoperability of air defence capabilities across Europe.¹¹⁵ Greece and Türkiye demonstrate their commitment to collective defence through joint participation in ESSI, which is separate from NATO.

As well as the traditional military security, energy security is an area where Türkiye can cooperate productively with the EU. Specifically, Türkiye's strategic position in certain countries in the region (especially Libya), provides a valuable opportunity to cooperate with the EU to enhance its energy security. Ankara hopes to retain its military presence in Libya to defend its security, energy, and economic interests, which are long-standing and a matter of Turkish national consensus.

However, Türkiye's MoU with Libya, in which it lays claim to a large swathe of the Eastern Mediterranean, is illegal and ignores established practices, as it has not been ratified by the Libyan parliament and has been invalidated by the Libyan High Court.¹¹⁶ Despite question marks over the validity of the MoU, Türkiye has been strengthening partnerships between Turkish and Libyan private-sector and state-owned companies in the oil, gas, mining and electricity sectors. Türkiye's fleet of seismic and drilling ships for oil and gas exploration and the swift development of the Turkish Sakarya Gas Field in the Black Sea attest Ankara's ability to help regional countries, like Libya, to develop their energy resources. The resolution of maritime differences between Greece and Türkiye is a significant prerequisite for unleashing the potential of broad regional cooperation between Türkiye and the EU, including Greece.

The Greek-Turkish maritime dispute has become less volatile since the 2023 Athens Declaration but remains far from resolution. Türkiye continues to claim expansive rights to oil and gas resources in the Eastern Mediterranean. Meanwhile, Greece continues to assert its rights under UNCLOS to the territorial waters and continental shelf surrounding its archipelago.

Greece's red lines include (but are not limited to) seismic surveys and exploitation activities by Türkiye in non-delimited maritime territories, military power projection activities in disputed waters or within Greek airspace, and oil and gas exploration in

¹¹⁴ Ezgi Akin, "Turkey, Greece formally join German-led defense shield project", *Al Monitor* (online), 15 February 2024, <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2024/02/Türkiye-greece-formally-join-german-led-defense-shield-project> (accessed 10 July 2024).

¹¹⁵ Linus Holler, "Türkiye and Greece to join European missile shield", *Defense News* (online), 16 February 2024, <https://www.defensenews.com/global/europe/2024/02/16/Türkiye-and-greece-to-join-european-missile-shield/> (accessed 10 July 2024).

¹¹⁶ Abdel Kader Assad, "Tripoli Court of Appeal annuls MoU in hydrocarbons cooperation with Turkey", *Libya Observer* (online), 19 February 2024, https://libyaobserver.ly/news/tripoli-court-appeal-annuls-mou-hydrocarbons-cooperation-Türkiye#google_vignette (accessed 10 July 2024).

areas that have not been demarcated by agreement. Türkiye must continue to respect these.

Greece has expressed readiness to negotiate with Türkiye to resolve their maritime differences, and there is a precedent in this regard. Greece signed good faith maritime delimitation agreements with Italy and Egypt in 2020.¹¹⁷ To accelerate their rapprochement, Greece and Türkiye should move to intense negotiations, with the aim of concluding a formal non-aggression agreement to fully normalise their relations and reaching negotiated technical solutions to their bilateral maritime dispute. Irreconcilable differences should be referred to the International Court of Justice in the Hague or to a court of arbitration that can provide either advisory or binding rulings.

Türkiye's maritime dispute with Greece continues to preclude Turkish participation in regional cooperative schemes and fora like the East Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF) and is holding up negotiations for the supply of Turkish gas to the EU. The EU has repeatedly expressed frustration over the impasse in discussions to settle Greek-Turkish maritime differences, given its interest in Türkiye's Black Sea gas and renewable energy.¹¹⁸ The EU should therefore assist Greece and Türkiye to build trust and work toward resolving their maritime differences and help both countries to identify creative means based on international law to defuse and manage their dispute.

Restoring trust is central for Türkiye to normalise relations with neighbouring countries and to invalidate perceptions that Turkish efforts to improve strained relations with neighbouring countries could end anytime. Restoring trust is also key for the EU to better embrace NATO ally Türkiye in transatlantic security and Europe's evolving security architecture, as Washington's commitment to European security cannot be taken for granted. Türkiye's flourishing defence industry and combat-tested capabilities can reinforce the European defence pillar – provided Ankara makes progress on core European principles and moves closer to the EU rather than distancing itself.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁷ *Greece and Italy sign agreement for delimitation of maritime zones* (Los Angeles: American Hellenic Council of California, 10 June 2020), <https://americanhellenic.org/greece-and-italy-sign-agreement-for-delimitation-of-maritime-zones/> (accessed 10 July 2024).

İdilir Lika, *The Greece-Egypt Maritime Agreement and Its Implications for the Greek-Turkish Dispute in the Eastern Mediterranean*, SETA Paper no. 20 (Ankara: Foundation for Political, Economic and Social Research [SETA], August 2020), <https://www.setav.org/en/assets/uploads/2020/09/A67En.pdf> (accessed 10 July 2024).

¹¹⁸ The Black Sea discovery is expected to allow Türkiye to increase gas exports while decreasing imports from Russia and Iran, whose contracts with Türkiye will expire in 2025 and 2026 respectively. David O'Byrne, "Turkey eyes greater role as gas re-exporter to Europe: Bayraktar", *S&P Global* (online), 23 September 2024, <https://www.spglobal.com/commodityinsights/en/market-insights/latest-news/natural-gas/092324-Turkiye-eyes-greater-role-as-gas-re-exporter-to-europe-bayraktar> (accessed 24 September 2024).

¹¹⁹ The European Council (EC) concluded in 2018 that accession negotiations with Türkiye had come to a standstill and decided that no further chapters could be opened or closed due to Ankara's drift away

It is in this context of strengthening the European defence pillar that Türkiye's defence company STM (Savunma Teknolojileri Mühendislik ve Ticaret A.Ş. / Defence Technologies Engineering and Trade) signed a contract with the Portuguese Navy in December 2024 to design and build two fleet replenishment ships, signalling Türkiye's first major European defence export.¹²⁰ It is also notable that Baykar, a private-sector Turkish defence company, has signed contracts to sell UAVs to European countries including Croatia, Poland and Romania, while Turkish armoured vehicle manufacturers have also won European contracts.¹²¹ Equally interesting is Baykar's acquisition of Italy's Piaggio Aerospace in a competitive tender¹²² and the setting up of a joint venture between Italian Leonardo Aerospace and Baykar to manufacture UAVs.¹²³ Türkiye's penetration of the European defence-industrial ecosystem not only confirms that Turkish products can be exported to other markets, but also transforms Türkiye into an important partner for European security. This cooperation is significant and evolving, despite the reported distance between Türkiye and the EU, as evidenced in the exclusion of Türkiye from the European Military Assistance Mission in support of Ukraine. Türkiye is still excluded from the EU's Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) military mobility project, despite being a NATO ally.

The rule of law and fundamental rights constitute an integral part of the EU-Türkiye relationship and efforts to build bridges by accelerating reforms in Türkiye should therefore continue. The EU-Türkiye High-level Dialogues that were suspended in 2019 in response to Türkiye's gunboat diplomacy in the Eastern Mediterranean and its human rights record, including non-implementation of ECHR judgements, should be reinstated in order to tackle bilateral irritants and discuss further areas of cooperation.¹²⁴

from the EU.

European Commission (EC), *State of play of EU-Türkiye political, economic and trade relations*, JOIN(2023) 50 final (Brussels, 29 November 2023), <http://bit.ly/4lUV7px> (accessed 24 September 2024).

¹²⁰ The contract, valued at €123 million, is the first for a Turkish company to design and build naval vessels for an EU member state.

Tom Waldwyn, *Türkiye's defence industry charts a course for European growth* (International Institute for Strategic Studies [IISS], 20 January 2025), <https://www.iiss.org/online-analysis/military-balance/2025/01/turkiyes-defence-industry-charts-a-course-for-european-growth/>. (accessed 05 March 2025).

¹²¹ Otokar, a major armoured vehicle manufacturer, signed a contract to supply Romania with 1,059 Cobra II 4x4 vehicles.
Ibid.

¹²² Tom Kington, "Italy sells Piaggio Aerospace to Turkish drone maker Baykar", *Defense News* (online), 30 December 2024, <https://www.defensenews.com/global/europe/2024/12/30/italy-sells-piaggio-aerospace-to-turkish-drone-maker-baykar/> (accessed 05 March 2025).

¹²³ Giulia Segreti, "Italy's Leonardo, Turkey's Baykar to set up drone joint venture", *Reuters* (online), 06 March 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/markets/deals/italys-leonardo-signs-mou-with-turkeys-baykar-drone-joint-venture-2025-03-06/> (accessed 07 March 2025).

¹²⁴ The European Council (EC) assessed in 2018 that accession negotiations with Türkiye had come to a standstill and no further chapters can be considered for opening or closing due to Ankara's move away from the EU.

European Commission (EC), *Joint Communication to the European Council – State of play of EU-Türkiye*

In line with the European Strategic Compass and the European Commission's White Paper for European Defence Readiness 2030, the EU's partnership with Türkiye in areas of mutual interest remains a priority as long as Türkiye de-escalates tensions with the EU.

In a multipolar world where, paradoxically, multilateralism is in retreat and bilateral relations are increasingly transactional,¹²⁵ cementing partnerships that uphold a rules-based international order can guarantee peace and security at the regional and global levels. Türkiye's partnership with the EU and with EU member state Greece has the potential to genuinely transcend the dominant zero-sum framework to arrive at a more positive win-win situation that guarantees mutual security gains in increasingly complex geopolitical landscapes.

political, economic and trade relations, JOIN(2023) 50 final (Brussels, 29 November 2023): 6, <http://bit.ly/4ePUyel> (accessed 24 May 2025).

¹²⁵ Josep Borrell, *Multipolarity without multilateralism* (Brussels: European Union External Action, 24 September 2023), https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/multipolarity-without-multilateralism_en (accessed 24 September 2024).

Abbreviations

AKP	<i>Justice and Development Party</i>
CAATSA	<i>Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act</i>
CBM	<i>Confidence Building Measure</i>
EDA	<i>European Defence Agency</i>
EEAS	<i>European External Action Service</i>
EEZ	<i>Exclusive Economic Zone</i>
EMGF	<i>East Mediterranean Gas Forum</i>
EUNAVFOR MED IRINI	<i>European Union Naval Force Mediterranean IRNI</i>
GREGY	<i>Greece–Egypt Electrical Interconnector</i>
ICAO	<i>International Civil Aviation Organisation</i>
MDCA	<i>Mutual Defense Cooperation Agreement</i>
MHP	<i>Nationalist Action Party</i>
MoU	<i>Memorandum of Understanding</i>
OSCE	<i>Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe</i>
RRF	<i>Recovery and Resilience Facility</i>
SAFE	<i>Security Action for Europe</i>
TPAO	<i>Turkish Petroleum Corporation</i>
UAV	<i>Unmanned Aerial Vehicle</i>
UNCLOS	<i>United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea</i>

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The Centre for Applied Turkey Studies (CATS) at Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP) in Berlin is funded by Stiftung Mercator and the Federal Foreign Office. CATS is the curator of CATS Network, an international network of think tanks and research institutions working on Turkey.

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