

Discussions Between Greece and Turkey Over the East Mediterranean Will End Before They Begin

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*The tensions between Greece and Turkey that became a geopolitical crisis in the East Mediterranean appears to be finally subsiding after Ankara withdrew from Greece's maritime space the Oruç Reis Turkish research vessel and the warships escorting it. Since Turkish **President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan** initiated the crisis at the beginning of August in search of oil and gas deposits in Greece's maritime space, his administration, along with Turkish media that is [90% controlled by the government](#), continually makes the claim that Greece must "demilitarize" their East Aegean islands "as stipulated by the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne." The [Treaty of Lausanne](#) set the borders of the modern Greek state, with the exception of the Italian-occupied Dodecanese islands that reunited with Greece in April 1947 after the signing of the Paris Peace Treaty between Italy and the World War II Allies. It also set the borders for the modern Turkish state.*

Turkey's withdrawal of the Oruç Reis and the warships escorting it opened up a new opportunity for Greece and Turkey to begin dialogue to resolve their differences in the East Mediterranean peacefully. However, it is likely that this plan for dialogue will end before it even begins as even discussion topics cannot be agreed upon. Athens insists that dialogue should only concentrate on the demarcation of maritime borders between Greece and Turkey, while Ankara says that any dialogue must also include discussions of Greece demilitarizing its East Aegean islands that lay directly opposite Turkey's coastline - in many cases only a few minutes boat ride away.

The claim that Greece's islands must be demilitarized, as continuously repeated by Turkey, is a manipulation of the Lausanne Treaty. For this reason, Athens will continually shut down any discussions of demilitarization. If we look at the case of the southeastern Aegean islands, collectively known as the Dodecanese, they are not held accountable to the Lausanne Treaty as Greece did not achieve sovereignty over the islands until more than two decades after the Treaty was signed. Instead, the Dodecanese are held accountable to the Paris Treaty, that Turkey is not a signatory of. Therefore, Turkey's insistence on the demilitarization of the Dodecanese constitutes a "[res inter alios acta](#)." According to [Article 34 of the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties](#), a treaty does not create obligations or rights for third countries, meaning that Turkey cannot demand that the Dodecanese islands be demilitarized.

In the case of Lesbos, Chios, Samos and Ikaria, the Lausanne Treaty makes no mention of these islands having to be demilitarized, but rather there can be no naval bases and no army fortifications. In addition, there can be no professional military presence besides the National Guard, a volunteer corps, which Greece has adhered to.

With regards to Limnos and Samothrace, the demilitarization of these islands, along with the demilitarization of the Turkish-controlled Dardanelle and Bosphorus Straits, as well as the Sea of Marmara and the Turkish-controlled Imvros (Gokceada), Tenedos (Bozcaada) and Rabbit Islands (Tavcan), the 1923 Lausanne Treaty on the Straits stipulated that these areas of both Greece and Turkey must be demilitarized. However, this was annulled by the [1936 Montreux Treaty](#), which, as it categorically states, replaces in its entirety the Lausanne Treaty regarding militarization. Greece's right to militarize Limnos and Samothrace was recognized by Turkish Ambassador in Athens at the time, Roussen Esref, with a letter sent to Greek Prime Minister Ioannis Metaxas on May 6, 1936. The Turkish government reiterated this position when the then Turkish Minister for Foreign Affairs, Rustu Aras, in his address to the Turkish National Assembly recognized Greece's legal right to deploy troops on Limnos and Samothrace, with the [following statement](#):

“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.”

In exchange, Turkey was able to militarize its islands, the Marmara Sea and the Straits, that they were not able to do due to the Lausanne Treaty.

Although Greece has every legal right to militarize its islands to varying degrees, and have done so within the bounds of the Treaty of Lausanne for Lesbos, Chios, Samos and Ikaria, the bounds of the Montreux Treaty for Limnos and Samothrace, and within the bounds of the 1947 Paris Peace Treaty for the Dodecanes, Turkey's insistence that the islands must be demilitarized threatens to end discussions between Athens and Ankara even before they begin.

Greece has categorically stated that there is no chance that demilitarized status of the islands will be discussed. This will inevitably create a deadlock between the two countries, thus likely ending discussions before they begin. As Erdoğan is maintaining a policy of constant crises to distract the population from the rapidly declining Turkish economy and lira, there is every chance that when the Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh) conflict subsides, he will resume tensions in the East Mediterranean and blame Greece for this eventuality as it did not demilitarize its islands as he demands.

From the Greek perspective, the islands must remain militarized so long as Turkey's Aegean Fourth Army exists. Turkey's Aegean Army was created only one year after the 1974 Turkish invasion of northern Cyprus. The Aegean Army frequently conducts military exercises opposite the Greek islands. These exercises include training on how to storm beachfronts. With Greece not only having a legal right to militarize its islands to varying degrees, but also watching Turkish threats against the East Aegean islands, dialogue will be deadlocked as Erdoğan will not backdown from his demands that the islands be demilitarized.

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