

EU-Turkey Relations

What is the issue?

- Tensions in the eastern Mediterranean has soared due to the issues between Turkey and Greece.
- Turkey sent an exploration vessel, accompanied by a Navy fleet, to the disputed waters.

What is the trigger?

- Turkey and Greece have historically shared troublesome relations.
- But, the trigger for the recent hostility between them has been the discovery of gas in the Mediterranean waters.
- The European Union (EU) has planned to transport the gas to its mainland, which would help reduce its dependency on Russia.
- This has raised the region's geopolitical profile.
- Turkey and Greece have overlapping maritime claims.

How was Turkey treated?

- The EU members and its allies in West Asia and Africa planned to build a gas pipeline from the Mediterranean to Europe's mainland.
- But they kept Turkey out of it, which infuriated Ankara.
- In the early 2020, the EastMed Gas Forum was formed by Cyprus, Egypt, Greece, Israel, Italy, Jordan and Palestine.
- Turkey was again excluded from this Forum.

What did Turkey do?

- Turkey challenged the pipeline project and reached an agreement with Libya's Tripoli-based government.
- According to this agreement, an exclusive economic zone (EEZ) will be formed from Turkey's southern shores to Libya's northern coast across the Mediterranean.

How did Greece respond?

- Greece claimed that the Turkish zone violated its maritime sovereignty.

- Later, Greece announced its EEZ with Egypt, which clashes with Turkey's zone.
- Immediately thereafter, Turkey sent its survey ship over.

What is the potential of this issue?

- This complicated issue has the potential to involve Europe, West Asia and North Africa.
- It is difficult to demarcate the maritime boundaries in the eastern Mediterranean, which is dotted with Turkish and Greek islands.
- Cyprus is physically divided with the southern part ruled by a recognised government and the northern part controlled by Turkey.
- Turkey's survey ship plans exploration activities around Greece's Crete Island.
- But Crete Island lies just outside the Turkish-Libya economic zone.
- Greece and Cyprus call this a violation of their sovereignty.

What is the alliance?

- France, the EU's most powerful military force, has thrown its weight behind Greece and Cyprus.
- Now, an alliance is emerging among Greece, Cyprus, Italy and France, which is backed by Egypt, Israel and the UAE.
- Turkey stands almost isolated, but remains a key power in the Mediterranean.

What should the EU do?

- If the EU wants to transport gas from the coast of Israel to Europe via Cyprus and Italy, an open conflict with Turkey cannot help.
- In everybody's interest, tensions should be dialled down.
- A diplomatic and mutually acceptable solution to the gas contest should be found.
- Excluding Turkey, which has a long Mediterranean coast, is unwise.
- Allowing a resurgent Turkey to bully smaller powers in the region would be strategically disastrous.
- The EU has to strike a balance between these two options.

Source: The Hindu



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