

The new international class and the geostrategic position of Greece and the Aegean in the new era

The collapse of the bipolar system and the spectacular improvement in relations between the Major Powers allowed the reappearance of a series of local and peripheral tensions and clashes which the logic of the bipolar system had managed to keep under control or at least keep them “on ice”.

The strategic environment today continues to remain complex and possibly dangerous. The main threat of a world war has receded considerably. National, economical, social and environmental tensions continue to bring about instability in the international security system. Peripheral clashes, the dispersal of weapons of mass destruction and a number of non-traditional, transnational and unforeseen provocations or dangers remain the main threats for the security of the nations.

The idiomorphic geographical composition of Greece’s lands which consist of a continental core (mainly highlands), of extensive multifarious coastlines with a multitude of natural harbours and bays, as well as a large number of islands, islets and rocky islets scattered throughout the Hellenic seas, gives Greece an especially geostrategic character, making the country Europe’s portal to Asia and Africa. Geography and history have placed Greece in a critical geopolitical position between Europe, Asia and Africa. Placed in the crossroads of East and West, North and South, and in a sea region (Eastern Mediterranean) with huge geopolitical significance, Greece is the only Member-State of the E.U., N.A.T.O. and W.E.U. situated in the area of the Balkans and the Eastern Mediterranean and in a sensitive geographical position surrounded by flashes of tensions and clashes. The double hypostasis of the Greek Nation reflects the continual historical Greek presence in this geographical region which in any event constitutes the cradle of the Greek Nation and civilization. At the same time, the unity of the continental and insular region reflects its especial geostrategic value, as well as the particular security needs of Greece.

With respect to its geostrategic status, the Aegean Sea with its Greek island complex, in combination with mainland Greece, is ideal for controlling the sea communication routes from the Black Sea and the Middle-East to Southern Europe and Northern Africa, which comprise the sea energy routes to the West. The Hellenic continental and insular region – situated in the contact site of three continents (Europe, Asia, Africa) and along the aquatic communication channel of two vital seas (Black and Mediterranean Seas) and by extension two oceans (Atlantic and Indian Oceans)- constitutes a unified and non-divisible defensive area, ranked among the strategic regions of world importance and interests. With respect to national security, this unified defensive area provides –depending on the direction of the threat- the required strategic depth to service the security needs of Greece.

The existence of international waters in the Aegean Sea creates more specific security needs for defending insular Greece and makes it vitally significant to secure uninterrupted air and sea communication lines between mainland and insular Greece.

Greece has the specificity of having to deal with the provocations of an internationally changing environment while concurrently dealing with the revisional policy of Turkey against our country and against Cyprus.

Turkey, contesting and systematically undermining the legal sovereign rights of Greece with almost daily violations of our national airspace and distorting the principles of International Law, is attempting to convince the international community that serious differences exist between the two countries, with the ulterior motive of wanting to change the status quo in the region in its favour through negotiations. Among the aspirations of Turkey is to extend the limits of its operational responsibility in the Aegean within the framework of N.A.T.O., extend the limits of its F.I.R. towards the west, extend the limits of its search and rescue, change the territorial status in areas in the Aegean (the first step being an attempt to create "grey zones") and mutually exploit the underwater wealth of the Greek continental shelf. At the same time, it is directly threatening our country with war in the case where Greece decides to exercise its legal rights by extending its territorial waters from 6 to 12 nautical miles (n.m.). Turkey is indubitably escalating its strategic tension, as seen by its provocations and assertions regarding the Imia rocky islet, which brought the two countries to the brink of war, the unprecedented contestation of Greek sovereignty of Gavdou (which it was required to abandon due to Greek and international reactions) and other islets and rocky islets in the Aegean, and the cold-blooded killing of civilians in Cyprus.

The Hellenic Government is acting responsibly and consistently so as to put an end to Turkey's aspirations for undermining the sovereign rights of Greece and to impose –through threatening the use of violence- a fait accompli in the Aegean.

TERRITORIAL STATUS IN THE AEGEAN

The territorial status in the Aegean was formulated about 65 years ago with the signing of the Lausanne Treaty by Great Britain, France, Japan, Rumania, the Kingdom of the Croats, Serbians and Slovenians, Greece and Turkey. What has changed after the Second World War was the sovereignty of the Dodecanese. These islands were granted to Greece with the Peace Treaty that was signed with Italy in Paris in 1947.

Our country appeared in Lausanne as a vanquished nation following the military destruction in 1922. Therefore the treaty that was signed there basically represented most of the Turkish demands and just a few of Greece's rights, with the latter resigning all that it had gained from the Serbian Agreement. However, our country always respected the territorial status quo that arose after the Treaty of Lausanne, despite the fact that it excluded from the borders all those areas that voluntarily and historically belonged to Greece. The country never had aspirations against Turkey. It never threatened the latter's territorial integrity. It never created any problems.

But Turkey for 50 long years never raised the matter of changing this. It had accepted the status quo without any objections. However, from 1973 its stance changed radically. For the first time it officially and pointedly expressed expansive tendencies against Greek sovereign lands. It raised the matter of our border islands, the Aegean continental shelf, our airspace and our territorial waters.

The most serious of these provocations was the invasion of Cyprus in July 1974 and the occupation of 37% of the island. And even though Cyprus is an independent nation and not part of Greece, it is still a part of Hellenism. And the predatory policy implemented by Turkey against Greece is indicative of its intentions and its orientations.

A first impression that may be assumed is that Ankara is basing this matter on erroneous foundations. Other than the territorial waters of the coastal nations, the Aegean still remains a free sea subject to the international status quo of open seas. International navigation has no restrictions in these waters. And naturally none of the countries that use these waters would tolerate these waters being turned into the closed waters of Greece or Turkey or even both together. They would protest and react. But no country has protested and no country has reacted accordingly. And this fact shows that the international status of the open waters that is applicable in the Aegean has not been infringed upon. Turkey's allegations that Greece has converted or is attempting to convert the Aegean Sea into its own private "lake" remains unsubstantiated. But since we cannot share the Aegean, what is it that Turkey is asking to share with us? There is nothing else except our sovereign rights. And this is exactly what it is contesting and conspiring.

THE GREEK CHARACTER OF THE ISLANDS OF THE AEGEAN AND THEIR CULTURAL CONTRIBUTION

The Aegean, or the Aegean Archipelagos as it was better known previously, was the cradle of Hellenic and Western civilization, filled with the legends, traditions and history of Greece.

Mythology says that it received its name from the second king of Attica, Aegeus, who seeing from afar the black sails of the ship of his son, Theseus, thought his son had been defeated and thus filled with sorrow, threw himself into the sea and drowned.

The Greek land and the Aegean resulted from the geological changes of the Aegeid which rose from the depths of the sea 30 million years ago. The Aegeis was composed of a compact mass that extended from the Ionian up to Asia Minor and the southern shores of Crete. Sinkages and elevations took place 5 million years ago and the waters of the Mediterranean surged into the cracks that were created, thus forming the Aegean.

The numerous islands and the security that was provided by the enclosed Aegean Sea facilitated sea communication links with the primitive transportation means of that period and helped the Aegean Greeks to transfer their civilization to neighbouring areas. Ephesos, Pergamos, Alikarnassos and other centres of civilization were creations of Hellenism along the Asia Minor coastline. Ancient findings that indicate human activities in the Aegean date back to the Paleolithic Era. More recent findings show that civilization was developed in the

Aegean during the Neolithic Era by the Aegeans. The people or race that initially resided on the islands of the Aegean, the eastern shores of continental Europe and the western coastlines of Asia Minor, better known as the Ionians, were called Aegeans by certain historians.

By the beginning of the Classical Era (479 B.C.), the Greeks had traveled to every corner of the Aegean and the regions adjacent to it, up to Southern Italy and the Black sea. Greeks inhabited Asia Minor up to 1922, when they were forced to flee to Metropolitan Greece as refugees.

Gods, semi-gods, heroes, wise men, scientists, traders and immortal works of art, followed later by saints, were born on the islands of the Aegean. Each and every island has something wonderful to offer.

But none of these islands however could show remains of ancient Greek cities, ports, aqueducts, churches as well as monuments that described their splendid Hellenic past, and even though the Aegean bore the brunt of many raids and was ruled by foreigners and for the greater part by the Turks, it remained as a whole nationally and culturally Greek.

The Turks appeared in the region very late in time. Their first raids against the islands of the Aegean took part during the 11th Century A.D. These were not the raids of conquerors with the object of extending their lands. This occupation lasted over three centuries. They finally managed to take the islands after the capture of Constantinople and the occupation of mainland Greece between 1456 and 1669, except for Tinos which was taken over in 1715. But they could never subdue these regions completely. Their sovereignty was limited. And their impact on the evolution of the islands was in general negative. They sucked them dry without offering anything and acted as a brake to their progress.

Despite this, the dynamism of the Hellenic island population was such that even under the Ottoman yoke they still found many ways not only to survive, but also to develop steadily. And this had reached such a peak by 1821, they were able to contribute essentially to the battle for the country's independence.

Today the Aegean is a vital part of Hellenic territory with great economical significance for our country, while also acting as a pole of attraction for tourists. The population of the islands surpasses one million inhabitants, while its area covers one-fifth of Greek sovereign land. The total length of Greek coastlines is 15,020.8 km, with the shores of the Aegean islands covering 72.8% of this; i.e. 10,942.8 km. Over and above this indicative data as to the importance of the Aegean, the islands in the region (2,463 of a total of 3,100 islands throughout the country), they constitute an important source of wealth for Greece, arising from fishing, farming and popular art, which always prospered within our island inhabitants.

UNPRECEDENTED TURKISH THEORIES

Taking as fact that the contestation of the Greek character of the Aegean constitutes a very unsound basis for Turkish territorial assertions in the region, the attempt to support its

influencing international thinking is also being carried out through various unprecedented theories lacking any bona fide bases, which if adopted internationally would lead to outrageous situations. In brief, the following demands have been presented from time to time through the various stated Turkish positions:

- a. Greece cannot be spread out throughout the Aegean and Turkey be enclosed in a narrow strip of water, only three miles wide from its shores.
- b. It is unfair that Greece has approximately 3,000 islands in the Aegean and Turkey only 2 (Imvros and Tenedos).
- c. Since the Aegean lies between two peninsulas -Greek and Turkish- it should be divided in the middle and one half given to Greece and the other half to Turkey.
- d. The islands that are situated near the Turkish coastline and far from Greece should be given to Turkey.
- e. Since the total population of the islands is much smaller than the population of the coastal regions of Turkey, a demographic problem has been created that cannot be ignored.

GREY ZONES

The unprecedented theory concerning “grey zones” was developed by Turkish officers from the middle of the ‘90s. This theory “reinterpreted” International Treaties and underlined the dispute over Hellenic sovereignty over a series of islands, islets and rocky islets in the Aegean. Specifically, Turkey asserted that Greek sovereignty extended only to those islands in the Aegean that are referred to by name in the context of the Treaties that had ceded the islands to Greece.

International Law, however, which had regulated the matters of sovereignty in the region following the World Wars (Treaties of Lausanne [1923] and Paris [1947]), is clear and unchallengeable.

However, Turkey is challenging it by lately presenting the theory of “grey zones”. It is obviously applying this “theory” when Turkish coastal-ships continue to violate Greek territorial waters. The Captains of the Turkish coastal-ships continuously refuse to conform to the intimations of the Hellenic Coast Guard and to withdraw from the region, which they continuously refer to as “Turkish sovereign waters”.

TERRITORIAL WATERS (NERITIC ZONE) – CONTINENTAL SHELF

Terminology

Territorial Waters (Neritic Zone) or Territorial Seas is the water section that is situated between the land regions of the nation, including all its internal waters and open seas. This

zone includes –other than the water mass- its corresponding depth and substratum, as well as the overhead airspace.

Territorial Waters are considered to be an extension of national land and the sovereignty of the coastal nation is expressed especially in matters such as navigation, coastal shipping, fishing, civil and criminal jurisdiction, customs supervision, protection of the environment, protection and maintenance of sea wealth, etc.

The continental shelf is a matter that has arisen over recent years, where scientific and commercial activities for researching, exploring and exploiting the depths of the seas have advanced at a rapid rate, developing economical interests. In general, the term “continental shelf” is used differently from the notions used by lawyers and geologists. Geology defines the continental shelf as the depth of the sea and the subsoil of the underwater areas which begin from the shores and end at the point where the depth of the underlying waters reaches 200 m. In contrast, International Law defines the continental shelf as the depth of the sea and the subsoil of the underwater areas which begin from the outside limits of the territorial waters and reaches up to a depth of 200 m or even beyond this limit, up to the point where the depth of the underlying waters allows the exploitation of natural resources,

Greece considers the delimitation of the continental shelf as the only difference, and always of legal nature, between the two countries and accordingly prejudices its judicial settlement. In contrast, Turkey foresees acquiring continental shelf rights west of the Greek islands in the Eastern Aegean and consequently endorsing it in a zone of Turkish jurisdiction and reveals its aspirations to convert a legal difference to a political one.

Background to the problem

The Greco-Turkish differences over the continental shelf in the Aegean dates back to November 1973, when a decision was published in the Turkish Government Gazette granting license to the Turkish State Oil Company to carry out a survey of the underwater areas near Greek islands. The Turkish Government proceeded to a similar action in 1974, while also extending the already granted areas. In addition, in 1974 and in 1979, two Turkish oceanographic ships (Tsantarli and Chora) carried out research work in the Aegean.

The objective and nature of the difference

The matter focuses on two specific points concerning the delimitation of the continental shelf; that is, on the one hand the sea extension of the borderline in Thrace and on the other hand the islands of the Northern and Eastern Aegean and the Dodecanese Islands that are all situated near the Turkish coastline.

In addition, the islands have full rights concerning the continental shelf, as is clearly prescribed by International Law and relevant jurisprudence, despite the baseless legal assertions of the Turks to the contrary.

As for resolving this difference, Turkey invokes the principle of a fair hearing, without being able to base it on reliable and specific criteria. In accordance with the Greek position concerning the delimitation of the continental shelf, International Law (contractual and common law) is applied within the framework where the rule of the mean line constitutes the predominating principle of Law concerning delimitation. This is also verified by international practice.

In addition, in accordance with international practice, the “special circumstances” (certain Greek islands close to the Turkish coastline) that Turkey is arbitrarily calling upon to resolve the problem of the continental shelf in the Aegean is nothing more than an exception to the rule of applying the mean line. Consequently, these viewpoints cannot justify the moving of the mean line from Eastern to Central Aegean, nor can they raise doubts as to the application of International contractual and common rule, that the islands have their own continental shelf.

TERRITORIAL WATERS - AIRSPACE

The territorial waters in Greece extend 6 n.m. from the natural coastline. In certain instances, this distance may be less than 6 n.m. in accordance with the application of the mean line or similar contractual adjustments. In only certain areas in Greek sovereign territory where the distance from the coastline of another country is less than the sum of the length of the corresponding territorial waters, there is a differentiation of the length of the Greek territorial waters. This is the case of the eastern coastlines of the islands of the Eastern Aegean and the Dodecanese.

In accordance with International Law, common and contractual, Greece has the right to extend its territorial waters to 12 n.m. During the ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, our country issued a statement that “the time and the place to exercise the rights in question, without this meaning in any manner whatsoever that the rights in question will be disregarded, is a matter that arises from its national strategy.”

It is noted that the right to extend their territorial waters up to 12 n.m. has already been exercised by many countries, including Turkey, which in 1964 extended its territorial waters in the Black Sea and the Mediterranean to 12 n.m.

After the Convention on the Law of the Sea was put into effect, Turkey threatened that it will consider the possible extension of the Hellenic territorial waters as a casus belli. On the occasion of the ratification of the afore-mentioned Convention by our country on 31st May 1995, the Turkish National Assembly passed a resolution on 8th June 1995 to grant the Government all competent rights, including military, to maintain and defend the crucial interests of Turkey. The resolution in question is still in effect and Turkey has not rescinded this policy.

Over and above the unorthodox stance of Turkey against International Law rules, the threat to use violence (*casus belli*) violates article 2 par. 4 of the Charter of the United Nations that prohibits Member-States from using threats or violence in international relations. Moreover, extending the territorial waters of any country to 12 n.m. is an absolute and inalienable right in accordance with the Convention on the Law of the Sea, which in any case codifies pre-existing common law.

Greece also has a neritic zone for aviation and policing needs, 10 n.m. in length. It should be noted that Turkey, up to 1975 and for 44 continuous years had recognised and respected this 10 n.m. arrangement, and since then it has contested this continually and is violating Greek airspace continuously. In fact, Turkish fighter formations –usually armed- not only violate the now disputed by Turkey sector of Greek airspace between 10 and 6 n.m., they infiltrate even deeper, passing 6 n.m.; i.e. passing into Greek airspace that Turkey recognises, while also overflying Greek islands.

Regarding this, it should also be noted that Greece, in compliance with international procedures, has made known the above legislation concerning national airspace without delay, in order to have legal consequences at the international level and specifically, against adjacent countries.

It is obvious that this late contestation on the part of Turkey as to the length of Greek airspace is part of a more general objective of the Turkish policy to revise the status quo in the Aegean.

FIR

On 7th December 1944 the Convention of the International Civil Aviation was signed in Chicago, which provided for the establishment of an International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO). ICAO defined the areas of responsibility for controlling the airspace of its member-countries (Flight Information Region - FIR). The Athens FIR was defined within the framework of European regional air navigation conferences during the 1950, 1952 and 1958. Turkey was present and accepted the defining of the airspace for which the responsibility was designated to Greece. The Athens FIR covers the entire Greek national airspace, as well as scattered sectors of international airspace. In accordance with ICAO regulations and international practice, Greece demands for reasons of safe civil flights that all aircraft –civil and military-submit flight plans before entering the Athens FIR.

Despite this, on August 1974 Turkey arbitrarily issued a NOTAM 714 ("notice to airmen"), with which it was trying to extend its area of jurisdiction up to the middle of the Aegean within Athens FIR. Greece then declared the Aegean a dangerous area (NOTAM 1157). ICAO called on both sides to resolve this issue but without success. Finally, Ankara in 1980 -and again unilaterally- withdrew its NOTAM 714 when it ascertained that this measure was detrimental to its interests, and especially affected tourism. However, Turkey has since stopped submitting flight plans for its military aircraft on the pretext that the Chicago Convention does not apply to these aircraft, and consistently refuses to submit flight plans

for military aircraft entering Athens FIR, and thus committing numerous violations of air traffic regulations and subsequently forcing the Civil Aviation Authority (and the Hellenic Air Force) to implement emergency procedures and the spending of significant funds in order to secure normal air traffic in the airspace of the Aegean.

The only time when Turkey submits flight plans, other than for civil aircraft flights, is when it seeks diplomatic permission for aircraft overflights that are to cross Greek territory for another country, and never for military flights in the international airspace in the Aegean. The Hellenic Air Force intercepts unidentified aircraft for recognition purposes, in accordance with the provisions of ICAO, for any aircraft entering the Athens FIR without submitting a flight plan.

Search and Rescue

Search and rescue for airplane accidents is governed by the Chicago Convention and ICAO Regulations. The Greek area for search and rescue in case of an air accident has been defined following regional agreement within the framework of ICAO (1952) and coincides with the Athens FIR.

The issues of maritime search and rescue are specified by the Hamburg Convention of 1979 that was adopted within the framework of the International Maritime Organization (IMO) and came into effect in 1985. Turkey, reacting to the Greek declaration, stated during a meeting of the subcommittee of the IMO on maritime safety that the areas of responsibility for maritime search and rescue in the open seas must be demarked in agreement with the interested coastal states and at the same time it submitted a map of the Aegean divided, as indicative of the limits of operational capabilities of the Turkish services. The Turkish declaration was rejected by Greece two days later, also during the afore-mentioned meeting.

In addition, Turkey, with Regulation 88/1988 defined the area of its responsibility for providing search and rescue services to endangered "air and sea means", which includes part of the Athens FIR up to about the middle of the Aegean, enclosing a large part of Greek territory within the Turkish search and rescue sector and ignoring that the areas of air search and rescue require a decision of the competent organs of ICAO.

MILITARY STATUS IN THE AEGEAN ISLANDS

The military status of the Greek islands in the Eastern Aegean is not unified and is governed by different International Agreements.

Turkey is the only country that calls for the demilitarisation of the "Islands of the Eastern Aegean", without any distinction, deliberately ignoring the fact that these Greek islands are governed by different regimes with regard to military equipment.

1. Limnos and Samothrace:

The demilitarisation of the Greek islands of Limnos and Samothrace, along with the demilitarisation of the Dardanelles, the Sea of Marmara and the Bosphorus, as well as the Turkish islands of Imbros (Gokceada), Tenedos (Bozcaada) and Lagouson (Tavcan), was originally provided for by the Treaty of Lausanne of 1923 on the Straits, annulled by the Montreux Treaty of 1936, which, as is categorically stated in the preamble, replaces in its entirety the above-mentioned Treaty of Lausanne.

The right of Greece to equip Limnos and Samothrace was recognized by Turkey, in accordance with the letter sent to the Greek Prime Minister on 6th May 1936 by the then Turkish Ambassador in Athens at that time, Roussen Esref, following instructions from his Government. The Turkish Government reiterated this position when the then Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs, Rustu Aras, in his address to the Turkish National Assembly on the occasion of the ratification of the Montreux Treaty, unreservedly recognised 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 neighbour and friendly country, Greece, and which were demilitarised in application of the 1923 Lausanne Treaty, were also abolished by the new Montreux Treaty, and this gives us great pleasure. Turkey gave similar assurances during the same period on this subject to the governments of interested third countries.

2. The status of the islands of Mytilini, Chios, Samos and Ikaria

With regard to the afore-mentioned islands, nowhere in the Peace Treaty of Lausanne is it specified that these will be under a demilitarised regime.

The Greek Government undertakes only the obligation, in accordance with Article 13 of the Peace Treaty of Lausanne, not to establish naval bases there nor fortification works.

While Greece has faithfully implemented the afore-mentioned provisions to date, Turkey has repeatedly violated the legal obligations incumbent upon her and continues to do so, despite the fact that the same article requires her not to permit her military aircraft to enter the airspace of the Greek islands in question.

On the other hand, the same article permits Greece to maintain a normal contingent called up for military service, which can be trained on-site, as well as a force of Gendarmerie and Police. The more general revisionist tendency of Turkey concerning International Treaties that determine the status of the Aegean, obliges and legalises Greece to be in a state of preparedness that will allow her -if necessary- to exercise her right to legitimate defence, as provided for in Article 51 of the United Nations Charter and to protect the Greek islands of the Aegean.

3. The Status of the Islands of the S.E. Aegean (the Dodecanese)

The Dodecanese islands were ceded to Greece "in full sovereignty" by the Paris Peace Treaty between Italy and the Allies in April 1947. Furthermore, the provisions of the Treaty in question provide for the demilitarisation of these islands: "The above islands shall be demilitarised and shall remain demilitarised". There is a National Guard force on the Dodecanese islands which has been declared in accordance with CFE provisions.

Turkey alleges that Greece is in violation of the Paris Treaty provisions. Three important parameters should however be taken into account:

1. The fact that Turkey is not a signatory party to this Treaty, which therefore constitutes a "res inter alios acta" for Turkey, i.e. an issue pertaining to others. According to Article 34 of the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties, "A treaty does not create obligations or rights for third countries".
2. The fact that the demilitarised status of the Dodecanese islands was imposed after the decisive intervention of the Soviet Union and echoes the political intentions of Moscow at that time. It should however be noted that the demilitarised status lost its reason for existence with the creation of NATO and the Warsaw Pact blocs, as incompatible with the participation of countries in military alliances.
3. Everything which has previously been said about Greece's right to legitimate defence is also applicable in this case.

THE IMIA CASE

The Turkish Foreign Ministry with verbal notes highlights Turkish sovereignty over Imia and calls for -within the practical application of the "theory of grey zones"- a comprehensive negotiation on the islands, islets and rocky islets in the Aegean, the status of which is supposedly undecided from a legal point of view.

However, the legal status of the islands and islets in the Aegean is clear. The Greek sovereignty over Imia clearly arises from international contractual texts; namely, the Treaty of Lausanne of 1923, the Treaty of Paris of 1947 and the Italo-Turkish Agreements of 1932.

The afore-mentioned legal argument complements the practical, peaceful and continuous exercising of sovereignty over Imia by Greece, uninterruptedly since 1947, without Turkey ever contesting it until the 1995-96 crisis.

THE TURKISH THREAT

Summing up all that which was analytically referred to in the individual units, we can say that a prolonged period of tension in Greco-Turkish relations begins from the decade of the '70s, with the contestation by Turkey of the international legitimacy on two levels. As early as 1973 a series of unilateral revisionary actions of the international legal status of the Aegean begins, followed in 1974 by the attempt to break-up the Republic of Cyprus through the invasion and occupation to date of the northern section of Cyprus.

The tension between Greece and Turkey peaked over the next decade. The two countries reached the limits of armed confrontation in March 1987 because of attempts to carry out Turkish underwater surveys in the area of the Greek Aegean continental shelf. The crisis was

gradually defused without however the bilateral relations being relieved from the burden of Turkish claims.

Indeed, from the 1990's Turkey threatens war if Greece extends its territorial waters. In addition, it raises the issue of its sovereignty over a part of Greek territory (Imia).

In addition, it can be said that the organisation of the Turkish Army is documented proof of the more generalised intensions of Turkey. The 4th Turkish Field Army of Aegean Field Army is situated in the Theatre of Operations of the Aegean, which includes 2 Brigades supported by units of the Turkish National Defence General Staff, the 1st Air Tactical Command and the Naval Commands of the Northern and Southern Aegean Regions that are situated in the Gulfs of Smyrna and Aksaz respectively.

Our country, for its part, upon evaluating the age-long problems, adopted a bold approach to Greco-Turkish relations, aiming to launch them through a framework of good neighbourly relations, governed by international rules of law that are in effect. To 1999 εγκαινιάσθηκε μία νέα διαδικασία προσέγγισης Ελλάδας - Τουρκίας, τόσο σε διμερές επίπεδο, όσο και στο πλαίσιο της ευρωπαϊκής προοπτικής της γείτονος, την οποία η χώρα μας σταθερά υποστηρίζει. In 1999 a new process of Greco-Turkish rapprochement was initiated, both at the bilateral level as well as within the European perspective of "neighbour" which our country firmly supports.

EPILOGUE

This is the homeland that the soldiers of our units are called upon to defend. As contemporary defenders of the borderlands they have the honour to protect our frontiers from every aspiring raider. As modern defenders of Thermopylae they will not concede even one centimetre of honourable Hellenic land. Liberty has been consolidated in the Aegean, as in every other part of Greece, through battles and sacrifices. We, you, as well as more recent generations, have a sacred obligation to honour this supreme sacrifice. It comprises the core of our history and it is especially important not to forget. "If it is right for races that have a history to be happy, it must be equally right that those who have a history and ignore it or forget it will be miserable".

It is a fact that knowledge of history is not useful only to remember events that defined our existence. Historical knowledge mainly bases its value on the fact that it comprises a source of lessons to assist us in determining our future course. Among the many events that have influenced the historical course of our people and our nation, the ones that stand out are the military ones because with these we secured our freedom, our sovereignty and our independence from whatever external conspiracies and regimes, thus allowing the uninhibited development of activities in other significant sectors of our lives.

Our Nation shows an unprecedented historical path dating back thousands of years, where significant events indelibly marked a course of greatness, national exaltation, heroism, self-denial and patriotism. The history of the Hellenic Army is indissolubly linked with Greece's Modern History and comprises an inexhaustible source of inspiration and encouragement

for future generations. The Hellenic Army secures and continues to ensure the ultimate goal of freedom. The difficulties that are encountered by our military on a daily basis far away from their homelands, along our frontier lands are known and are accepted. Difficulties that are however necessary for the success of their missions. Success emanates from perfect organization, correct training and high morale. Finally, these difficulties are national commands for all those who want the honour of calling themselves Greeks.