

Turkish aggressivenesss, Montenegro crisis simmer in wider region



Continued Turkish provocations on several levels – amid a slumping economy in that country, the continuing slide of its currency and repercussions from the Covid-19 pandemic – as well as the standoff in Montenegro between the Orthodox Church there and the government, with the latter stepping up persecution in order to stamp out opposition to a controversial law it passed regarding religious institutions, dominated much of the regional attention in SE Europe this week.

Speaking from Athens, Greek defense minister Nikos Panagiotopoulos reminded that his government will never begin any dialogue with Ankara unless the Erdogan administration stops its offensive behavior, as he said.

The minister spoke to an Athens-based television station.

An increasingly authoritarian and interventionist Erdogan administration has stepped up its military adventurism in Syria and Iraq, as well as in Libya, often siding with Islamist extremists, while presenting a unilateral and baseless interpretation of maritime law and maritime zone delimitation, in place of its standing refusal to recognize, let alone sign, the International Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).

The saber-rattling and jingoism by official Ankara comes on the heels of continued inflammatory comments and threats to reconvert the iconic Hagia Sophia into a so-called “conquest mosque”.

The latest top Turkish minister to chime in on the future of the greatest of all cathedrals of eastern Christendom was justice minister Abdulhamit Gul, who said in an interview that the Hagia Sophia will function as a mosque, “...one way or another”, and regardless of what a Turkish high court will decide early next month.

Halfway around the world, the Archbishop of America, His Eminence Elpidophoros, also expressed his grave concerns over the developments in Turkey.

In a related development, US Senator Robert Menendez, who represents New Jersey, this week addressed a letter to US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, citing what he called Turkey’s aggressiveness against some of America’s closest allies in the wider region, such as Greece and Cyprus.