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Non-stop Turkish aggressiveness, provocations in east Mediterranean, Near East



Turkish provocations continued unabated this week throughout the eastern Mediterranean and Near East, days after a shocking decision by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan to convert the iconic Hagia Sophia back into a mosque, from the present status as a museum.

Official Turkey continued its saber-rattling and mischief by again tabling demands for so-called mutual exploitation of maritime zones, which based on international law mostly fall within other countries' sovereignty, as well as by again referring to a Muslim minority in northeastern Greece as a "Turkish minority" and by even issuing threats against predominately Christian Armenia, on its eastern borders.

In a bid to keep Turkey's unilateral demands and aggressiveness in the headlines, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu on Tuesday, in fact, revealed that a previously unannounced meeting between Greek, Turkish and German officials, and mediated by Berlin, took place ahead of the European Union Foreign Affairs Council on Monday. EU foreign ministers also discussed the insulting decision to convert eastern Christendom's greatest cathedral, the Hagia Sophia, back into a mosque.

Cavusoglu's revelation was seen as undermining the prospects of the three-party framework of talks.

The contacts had been intended to be a confidential exchange between high-ranking diplomatic advisers affiliated with the German chancellery, and the offices of the Greek premier and the Turkish president, namely, Jan Hecker, Eleni Sourani and Ibrahim Kalin, respectively.

According to sources, Hecker had been due to meet with Greek diplomat for talks on the EU's coronavirus recovery fund and, separately, with Kalin ahead of Monday's EU Foreign Affairs Council meeting, whose focus was on Ankara's aggression in the east Mediterranean and its shocking decision regarding the Hagia Sophia.

Turkish FM reveals otherwise confidential meeting between Greek, Turkish diplomats with Berlin mediation

According to German sources, a proposal was tabled during the meeting for a resumption of exploratory talks between Athens and Ankara, which broke off in 2016. The conditions set for a resumption of talks, the same sources said, were that Turkey crack down on smuggling networks used by illegal migrants in its territory in a bid to enter Greece, as well as halting illegal hydrocarbon exploration in the eastern Mediterranean, a prospect declined by the Turkish side.

It's noteworthy to point out that the Turkish foreign minister uses threatening and provocative language in referring to other countries when speaking domestically, to a Turkish audience — ruling out, for instance any so-called “back-tracking”. Conversely, he uses an utterly conciliatory and pacifying tone when in Europe.

In a related development, Athens Polytechnic engineering professor Tonia Moropoulou this week referred to a World Heritage site and an emblematic monument of Orthodoxy and Byzantium, in comments given to a newspaper on the island of Rhodes, when asked about the Hagia Sophia.

She called for the immediate condemnation of Erdogan's decision by the UN and other international organizations, referring to a debasement of the site.

Prof. Moropoulou headed the team of engineers and scientists from the Polytechnic who planned and executed the restoration of the Holy Kouvouklion, or small chapel, within Holy Sepulcher Church of Jerusalem.