The maritime dispute between Türkiye and Greece and its impact on government policy.

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Abstract

This paper sought to analyse which underlying motives impacted the stances and policies taken by Greece and Türkiye regarding their disputed maritime border. The maritime border consists of two distinct areas, the Aegean Sea, and the Eastern Mediterranean Sea. The analysis chose to study the two areas separately since there are differences between them. The study was conducted through the lens of Morgan and Palmer’s general theory of foreign policy, in which a state either acts reactively to preserve the current situation, or proactively to try and change it. The result of the study shows that both states acted because of security related, economic, and hegemonic motivations as well as to protect their sovereignty and national rights. Security concerns played a significant role in the dispute, as both states deemed the other to be a threat. Because of this, both Greece and Türkiye acted reactively against each other. At the same time, Türkiye was also found to be more likely to act proactively compared to Greece who often either acted in response to Türkiye or indirectly through its allies such as the EU or Egypt.

Key words

Greece, Türkiye, Aegean Sea, Eastern Mediterranean, Exclusive economic zone, Maritime borders, Territorial seas, Continental shelf
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1 Introduction

1.1 The multifaceted conflict

The ongoing conflict between Greece and Türkiye has persisted for a long time as it begun when both states where a part of the Ottoman empire (Choulis, Mehrl & Ifantis 2022:781-783). The fraught relationship has not only had an impact on both states but has also been a continuous point of instability for the region. The long-lasting conflict has also taken on a multifaceted character that includes many areas of dispute. Among these areas are disputes over the treatment of national minorities and their historical heritage (International crisis group 2021:7-8). A clear example of this is outlined in the article “Erdogan proposal to make Hagia Sophia a mosque irks Greece” (2019) where it is noted that Greece has criticised Türkiye for turning the historically Greek orthodox church Hagia Sophia back into a mosque.

Out of the many disputes between the states, there are two which have had a significant impact on the fraught Greek-Turkish relations and must therefore be discussed in order to understand the current situation. The first of the two is the Cyprus conflict, in which the island nation was invaded and partly occupied by Türkiye (International crisis group 2021:3). The invasion of Cyprus led to the creation of a Turkish inhabited state in the north of the island which has gone largely unrecognised by the international community. The second important area of conflict is the delimitation of maritime borders between Türkiye and Greece which has been a particularly important cause for instability since it nearly drove the countries to war on multiple occasions (Hellenic republic ministry of foreign affairs 2018).

The latest of instance of instability caused by the maritime border dispute happened in 2019-2020 and nearly threw the region into war (Choulis,
Mehrl & Ifantis 2022:782). The longevity of the conflict and its volatile nature shows that it not only poses a real danger to the region but that it is also hard to solve. It is therefore vital to examine the conflict in order to understand which motives fuel the continuation of fighting and bickering between Greece and Türkiye. Having a deeper understanding of the factors that drive conflict between the states is the first step in figuring out a workable solution that can finally put an end to the disputes once and for all. As the conflict has gone on for a long time, it would be more fruitful to analyse the recent developments as they show which motives are more important in driving recent developments.

When looking at the current level of research, there is also notable gap when it comes to explaining the underlying causes behind the conflict. Studies such as Choulis, Mehrl and Ifantis (2022) discuss the military implications of the conflict but does not study the underlying motivations which feeds them. Other research such as the article by Stocker (2012) instead only study the economic motivations that drive up conflict. There is therefore a need to conduct a broader study that can examine how multiple motives influence the maritime border dispute between Greece and Türkiye. As previous research often only focused on one aspect, they might overlook how other motives have led to the continuation of the conflict. Before presenting how the study will be conducted, the paper first needs to give an overview of the maritime dispute and explain some related terminology so that the following sections are not confusing for the readers.

1.2 A short explanation of maritime terminology

The disputed maritime border runs across two distinctive areas of the Mediterranean, the Aegean Sea, and the Eastern Mediterranean Sea. The border dispute is slightly different in both areas, which means that they must be presented and discussed separately. To understand the difference between the disputes, it is first necessary to discuss terminology related to maritime
borders. The first of these is the territorial sea, which covers a distance of 12 nautical miles from a coast and in which the state has full control over its waters (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) 2023). Foreign ships are allowed to transit through the area if they do so with friendly intentions. The second concept is the continental shelf, which is the underwater seabed and the exclusive rights to exploit it (ibid). The shelf extends 200 nautical miles from the coast and gives a state the exclusive rights to its natural resources. If two states shelves connect, then the 200-mile rule does not apply. A similar concept is the exclusive economic zone (from now referred to as EEZ), which also gives states exclusivity to exploit resources in an area of 200 nautical miles (NOAA n.d). These recourses also include living resources such as seafood. The difference between the continental shelf and the EEZ is that the former only gives rights over the seabed while the latter also includes the sea itself (U.S Department of State n.d).

1.3 The maritime dispute explained

The first of the disputes takes place in the Aegean Sea, which is located west of the Turkish mainland and includes many Greek owned islands such as Lesbos or Rhodes. This part of the dispute revolves around the delimitation of the continental shelf between the states and the size of their territorial seas (Falk 2022). The dispute over the territorial sea is not about current borders, but about potential ones (Özertem 2021). Unlike most territorial waters that reach outwards toward 12 nautical miles, the ones in the Aegean instead only stretch out for 6 nautical miles. Greece wants to extend their waters to 12 miles, an action which Türkiye considers as a reason for war since it would force Turkish vessels in the Aegean to travel through Greek waters. Türkiye also argues that the Greek islands do not have a right to their own continental shelf, which is disputed by Greece (Hadjicostis 2023).
The dispute in the Eastern Mediterranean similarly concerns the rights of islands, as Greece claims that their island of Kastellorizzo gives the country an extended maritime border at the expense of Turkish maritime claims (Özertem 2021). This border dispute deepened in 2019 when Türkiye signed a controversial maritime border agreement with Libya that ignored the potential rights of important Greek islands such as Crete (Dalay 2021:5-6). In response, Greece signed a border agreement with Egypt that clarified the limits of their EEZ (Stamouli 2020). The new agreement and maritime borders clashed with the borders set up by Türkiye and Libya. Both maritime border disputes have similarities in that they mostly revolve around the continental shelf, but also differ in that the Aegean dispute also tackle the difficult subject of sovereign territorial seas.

1.4 Purpose and research question

The purpose of this paper is to analyse the underlying motivations which drives up conflict and impact the political decisions and policy that is implemented by Greece and Türkiye in the Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean seas. The analysis is going to be conducted by answering the following research question.

- Which factors impacted the government policies of Greece and Türkiye in the Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean seas in the period 2019-2022?

1.5 Disposition

The paper began with a discussion about the conflict between Greece and Türkiye with a particular focus their disputed maritime borders. This section also introduced the research question that the study is going to answer. The second and third sections of the paper discusses the theoretical lenses in which the analysis will be conducted as well as an overview over the previous research made on the topic. The third section presents the studies
methodological design and its limitations. Finally, the last two sections present the results of the study and the conclusions which can be drawn from it.

2 Theoretical framework

2.1 General theory of foreign policy

The analysis will be conducted by using the foreign policy theory proposed by Morgan and Palmer (1997). The theory claims that a state bases its actions around a status quo, in which the state either seeks to maintain or change the status quo for its own benefit (Morgan & Palmer 1997:227-228). State action that is meant to uphold the status quo is security enhancing, while actions that try to change are proaction enhancing. Depending on the foreign policy question, a states can both engage in changing and preserving different status quos (Morgan & Palmer 1997:227-229). The authors further elaborate the theory by theorising that weaker states more often seek security while more powerful states instead are more proactive (Morgan & Palmer 1997:228, 231). More powerful states are therefore more prone to initiate conflicts while the weaker, security seeking states often engage in conflict in response to being agitated by another state (Morgan & Palmer 1997:225).

The theory explains foreign policy decisions taken by states and will therefore aid in explaining the motivations behind the steps taken by Greece and Türkiye in the conflict. It explains the ways in which the motivations propelled the states into action and why certain developments took place. Because while the chosen theory does not directly explain the motivations, it instead serves as a good framework that shows why they acted upon those motivations. The theory is especially suited to study the chosen conflict because it includes two states in which one is more powerful than the other. In this case, Choulis, Mehrl and Ifantis (2022:786) argue that Türkiye not only is but has always been superior to Greece militarily. In the previous
section of the paper, it was mentioned that Greece signed a maritime border
treaty with Egypt in response to Türkiye signing one with Libya. This
example shows that the theory has a high likelihood of applying to the
studied conflict, as Greece would have acted in response as the weaker state
in line with the theory. Of course, to make assumptions about the actions of
both states, the paper must first discuss previous research that will give an
insight into the potential motivations behind the conflict.

3 Literature review

3.1 Greek-Turkish relations
Before discussing the specifics of the maritime border disputes, the paper
shall first present research about the relationship between Greece and
Türkiye as this could also give an idea about how the states interact. As
previously mentioned, Choulis, Mehrl and Ifantis (2022) present the
relationship between the states from a security perspective that focuses on
arms spending. Through their analysis, the authors found that Turkish
military spending was positively connected to an increase in airspace
violations while an increase in Greek spending instead resulted in fewer
airspace violations (Choulis, Mehrl & Ifantis 2022:791-792). Greek spending
is also noted to react and change in reaction to Turkish spending (Avramides
1997; Kollias & Paleologou 2002 in Choulis, Mehrl & Ifantis 2022:783). The
Turkish side views Greece as a strategic target and as a security threat
(Choulis, Mehrl & Ifantis 2022:785). At the same time, Greek experts view
Turkish policy as unacceptable and revisionist (Choulis, Mehrl & Ifantis
2022:782).

The security dimension is supported by Aydin and Ifantis (2002:5-6) who
argue that the relationship between Greece and Türkiye is an example of
aggressive power politics in which relations between states is constructed
around conflict. The security dimension also relies on held perceptions on
both sides in which Greece and Türkiye sees the other as unreliable and revisionist (Aydin & Ifantis 2002:4). In reference to Dokos chapter later in their book, Aydin and Ifantis (2002:10-11) explain that a significant part of this distrust is built upon historical wounds. Ayman (2002:225-226, 236) writes that both states use military might to deter the other, but also that Greece more often uses other means to weaken Türkiye because of the power imbalance that exist between both states. The author also claims that Turkish deterrence mainly tries to stop Greece from changing the status quo (Ayman 2002:224).

A clear takeaway from the previous research on the interstate relationship is that security motivations play a vital role in the actions of both states. At the same time, Ayman’s claim that Türkiye’s main action was to deter Greek changes to the status quo goes against what was previously assumed. Since the book was written in 2002, it is possible that things might have changed over time as the text by Choulis, Mehrl and Ifantis more so implied a proactive stance from Türkiye where they would increase the amount of airspace violations if Greece spent less on their military. In any case, the research show that both sides view the other as revisionist and untrustworthy.

While the general relationship might be stained by security confirms, this does not fully confirm if this is the only driving motivations behind the maritime disputes. The following two sections will therefore dive deeper into the specifics of both conflicts.

3.2 Aegean dispute

The dispute in the Aegean Sea has similarities with the overall conflict in that security motivations plays an important part. To start with, Türkiye has security concerns over navigational freedom that could arise because of Greece having more control over the Aegean waters (Van Dyke 1996:400). Greece on the other side similarly sees the Turkish stance as threatful in that it indirectly challenges the sovereignty of Greece over their Aegean islands
(Rizas 2009:370-371). Kalkan (2020:168) similarly argues the importance of security related issues for both states regarding their stance about the Aegean dispute. While it can therefore be easily to simply think of the motivations as security related, there are also other potential factors that need to be explored. Mehmet and Yorucu (2022:21) argue that Greece has an economic interest in the Aegean seabed and its potential hydrocarbons. Similar motives can be found on the Turkish side, as Türkiye has granted drilling permits for oil companies in the sea (Rizas 2009:370). The border dispute did in fact start in 1974 when a Turkish oceanographic ship sailed out to explore disputed waters (Kalkan 2020:169).

Previous research also shows the importance of fundamental questions of sovereignty. As previously mentioned, Greece sees the Turkish maritime claims as a threat to its sovereignty over its islands. Türkiye on the other hand believes that the Greek stance on the maritime border as deeply unfair as it would severely limit the rights of its maritime territories and would also confine the state to its coastline (Avar & Lin 2019:62). The Turkish perspective on sovereignty is also heavily influenced by a concept known as Mavi Vatan¹ in which Türkiye is seen as a maritime state with sovereign and extensive maritime zones (Grigoriadis 2022:809-810). While it could be argued that sovereignty partly falls into security or even economic rights, the potential implications of the Mavi Vatan principle is worth discussing on its own.

3.3 Dispute over the Eastern Mediterranean

As with the overall relationship between Greece and Türkiye, security concerns seem to have also played a role in the Eastern Mediterranean. Grigoriadis (2022:807-809) claims that Türkiye has vital security concerns over being excluded from the region and isolated by Greece and another

¹ Directly translated as Blue homeland
regional states. The oil pipeline that was planned to be built by Greece and its allies therefore led Türkiye to take a reactive role in preventing it. At the same time, Greece similarly sees the protection of its claims as vital in defending the interests and sovereignty of the state (Schaller 2022:566). A study by İpek and Gür (2022:12) shows that security related concerns where dominant in the Greek view about the Eastern Mediterranean. On the other hand, the principles of Mavi Vatan seem to have played a part in the actions of Türkiye, in which the country should expand its maritime influence and control large swatches of the sea (Grigoriadis 2022:807-811). The matters of sovereignty outside of security is therefore also vital in this part of the maritime border dispute.

Previous research also highlights potential economic motivations, as the dispute in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea largely begun after natural resources were found in its waters (Grigoriadis 2022:806). Eissler and Arasil (2014:74, 76) explains that Greece was interested in the potential income that could come from the natural resources while Türkiye similarly had plans to become an important economic trading hub.

3.4 Hypothesis

By analysing the previous research, it is possible to make hypotheses for the study. Firstly, earlier studies have shown that both Greece and Türkiye have taken a security enhancing or proactive role depending on the circumstances. It also identified three important areas that fuel conflict. The dominating one is regarding security concerns, which exists all throughout the Greek-Turkish relationship. A similar, but slightly different area comes in the form of sovereignty in which both states see it as vital to protect their sovereign control over their territories. This area is also connected to expansionist tendencies in Turkish politics because of the Mavi Vatan policy. Economic motivations also seem to play a part in fuelling the dispute, where it is especially driving up conflict in the Eastern Mediterranean. It seems to play a
lesser role in the Aegean, where security seems to be more important. Based upon this, the analysis makes the following hypotheses.

- The main driving force behind conflict in the Aegean Sea is security related concerns and questions of existential sovereignty.
- The main driving force behind Greek actions in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea is security related concerns while Turkish actions are a broader mix of security concerns and expansionist sovereignty claims.
- Economic motivations do play a part behind the actions of both states, but more so in the Eastern Mediterranean.

4 Method and material

4.1 Method

4.1.1 Conducting the analysis

In order to conduct the analysis, the paper will base its analysis on material that has been published in the period 2019-2022 so that it can capture the stances and motivations that impacted recent developments. The material that the study is based on will be directly sourced from the Turkish and Greek governments so that the study can more accurately show the underlying motivations behind the actions of both states. While the paper has an element of discovery in investigating the conflict, it is also going to operationalise data to structure the potential findings. The collected data will then be analysed as a qualitative representational analysis. This section of the paper will also discuss the limitations with the chosen design.

4.1.2 Qualitative content analysis

The paper will be conducted as a qualitative content analysis. The qualitative analytical design is fruitful for the analysis as it allows the paper to study important parts of the chosen material rather than the material as a whole.
(Esaiasson, Gilljam, Oscarsson, Towns & Wängnerud 2017:211). As such, the qualitative analysis is appropriate for researching specific passages that show which underlying motivations drove up the conflict. The study will more specifically be conducted as a systematic analysis rather than as a critical analysis since this form of analysis will allow the text to systematically analyse and structure the material into categories as to find the meaning behind the text (Esaiasson, et. al. 2017:213-214). The systematic qualitative study is similar to the qualitative content analysis that the paper will be based upon since it allows the paper to analyse the contents of a text (Boréus & Kohl 2018:51). The qualitative content analysis will also allow the paper to find patterns throughout the chosen material which will give the study a clear overview of the analysed material (Boréus & Kohl 2018:51-52). By conducting the study as a content analysis, this will also allow the text to take note of similarities and differences in the material (Graneheim, Lindgren & Lundman 2017:29). The chosen methodological design therefore allows the paper to find patterns in the material and to see if these patterns align or differ from each other.

The qualitative content analysis will further be conducted through two analytical lenses. Firstly, the material is analysed through the theoretical lenses that were discussed earlier in the paper. Through this framework, the paper can show if the states acted to enhance their security or proaction. Secondly, the study will analyse its content through the lens of representation. Bacchi and Eveline (2010 in Esaiasson, et. al. 2017:217) proposes that these lenses can answer questions related to how a policy problem is represented. These representations cover multiple areas such as the inherit nature of the problem, the cause, and solutions to the problem as well as to how involved actors are represented. This analytical framework can help in identifying how the maritime dispute is represented by both states and therefore which underlying issues and motivations drive them to act. For example, if the conflict is represented as an issue of national security, then it
can be concluded that this aspect serves as a vital piece of motivation that has impacted policy decisions.

4.1.3 Operationalisation

Another dilemma that arises when deciding on the research design is whether the proposed categories are going to be decided on beforehand or if they will be created based upon the findings made when analysing the given material (Esaiasson, et. al. 2017:222-224). While the paper has proposed an open study that aims to discover the underlying motivations behind the conflict, it can be argued that the study should also include a couple of pre established categories based upon the previous research. In the previous section of the paper, the areas of security, economy, and sovereignty where all identified as important areas for the conflict. Because of this, these three should therefore be included in the analysis as they are likely to play a part. Esaiasson, et. al. (2017:224) proposes that it can sometimes be fruitful to include to both open and closed categories in a study. The paper is therefore going to follow this recommendation and include a fourth, open category that includes areas that fall outside of the three predetermined categories.

The three categories need to be further operationalised, as this will allow the study to more accurately specify and categorise the data into the established categories (Esaiasson, et. al. 2017:56). To begin with, Grizold summarises the classical definition of national security as “[...]security of the national territory, (including air-space and territorial waters), protection of the lives and property of its population, existence and maintenance of its national sovereignty, and exercise of the basic functions of its society (economic, sociopolitical, cultural, ecological, social, etc.).” (Grizold 1994:41). This definition needs to be expanded as it does not account for other security issues such as the Turkish concern over being restricted from transiting through the Aegean Sea. The matter of sovereignty also needs to be dislocated and expanded upon as the classical definition of security mainly
concerns the maintenance of sovereignty and not the potential expansion of it.

Thomson specifies sovereignty as “[...]Sovereignty is the recognition by internal and external actors that the state has the exclusive authority to intervene coercively in activities within its territory.” (Thomson 1995:219). The paper will need to further add on to this definition as the conflict in characterised by the lack of mutual recognition of sovereignty. The paper will therefore settle on defining sovereignty in the conflict as the maintenance or expansion of a country’s territory in which that state has the exclusive right to conduct coercive activities. This definition separates the concept of sovereignty from that of security and establishes the exclusive right of states to act in that territory.

Building upon this, the paper will define security as the protection of a country’s territory, waters, basic societal functions, its population, and their property, as well as the protection of interests that are vital for the security of the state. This definition is expanded to include the vital security areas that are outside of the countries territory and places a higher value on protecting the territory rather than the administration and control of it. Lastly, the paper will operationalize the category economic interests as actions that will aid in the expansion and development of the wealth and prosperity of a state. This definition is based upon the potential economic gains that both Greece and Türkiye are hoping to acquire in their waters as discussed in the literature section.

4.2 Material

For the analysis to be able to directly study the underlying motivations of Greece and Türkiye, it is going to rely on direct sources from both governments. It is going to base the analysis on documents that are relevant and gives fresh information. It will therefore not analyse material which does
not show the underlying motivations or those that consists of repeated information. Firstly, the material is going to be collected from the ministries of foreign affairs (MFA) from both states. The ministries were chosen since they are directly involved with foreign policy and are therefore highly relevant to the research topic. The data on the Turkish MFA website will be acquired from the section Press Releases and Statements where foreign policy statements can be found. As a counterpart, the statements from the Greek MFA are found in the section called Announcements – Statements – Speeches.

Secondly, the material is going to be gathered from the websites of the Turkish president and Greek prime minister. Since Greece is a parliamentary state, real power is vested in the government and prime minister rather than the president (Hellenic Republic Greece in the World 2023). As the most important man in the government, it is therefore a relevant source for the analysis. The material from the website is sourced by going through each month on the archive button and then extracting relevant publications. Similarly, Kirişci and Toygür (2019:1, 3) claim that the Turkish state has recently been centralised under a new presidential system that gives extensive power to the president Erdogan at the expense of other institutions such as the military and even the MFA. As such, it is also highly relevant to include sources directly from the Turkish president. The material is acquired from a search engine on the presidential website in which the time frame is specified from 2019-2022.

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2 Material collected from the website of the Turkish MFA. Available at https://www.mfa.gov.tr/sub.en.mfa?248a41bb-6744-4d91-91d7-500bd7a2cac1
3 Material collected from the website of the website Greek MFA. Available at https://www.mfa.gr/en/current-affairs/statements-speeches/
4 Material collected from the website of the Greek Prime minister. Available at https://www.primeminister.gr/en/2019/02
5 Material collected from the website of the Presidency of Türkiye. Available at https://www.tccb.gov.tr/Search?s=aegean&p0=aegean&p1=-542--558--1696--&p2=01.01.2019&p3=05.12.2023&sT=1&langText=en&presidentId=12
4.3 Limitations

Before presenting the results of the study, the paper must first discuss the flaws and limitations with its design. To begin with, it should be noted that the author of the text cannot speak either Turkish or Greek. Because of this dilemma it means that the study is not able to use certain material or previous research that could be useful for answering the research questions. Secondly, as the paper only covers the most recent period, it could be argued that it is missing an important temporal dimension when it comes to explaining the motivations behind the dispute. As the motivations might have been slightly different in the past, this could have served as an interesting point of comparison with the current period and can also give a further understanding of the peculiarities of the conflict.

Since the analysis focuses on the Greek-Turkish border disputes it might lose some important context and information by not also analysing material related to Cyprus as they also have an intertwined maritime border dispute with Türkiye (Hadjicostis 2022). However, since the Turkish government sees their maritime border disputes with both Greece and Cyprus as heavily interconnected, it should also be reasonable to assume that they have similar stances regarding both disputes (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2020a). The paper is therefore going to include some general statements made regarding Türkiye’s stance on the Cypriot maritime border if it does not stray too far from the general topic of maritime disputes.

Another limitation with the paper is that it does not account for additional factors such as domestic politics or propaganda. Factors such as these could potentially impact the content of the material and the way in which the conflict is represented. As the paper is mostly focused on what is being said by both governments, it can not give the full picture over the political stances of the states. However, since the paper is still based upon a substantial
amount of data it does still have the ability to show relevant aspects of the underlying motivations behind the conflict.

5 Results

5.1 Turkish motivations regarding the maritime border dispute

5.1.1 Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs on the Aegean Sea

To begin with, in the period 2019-2022, the Aegean dispute was discussed in detail in six separate publications. In 2019, it was discussed once in which Türkiye argues that the Greek territorial claims are maximalist and deny the inherit rights of the Turkish state (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2019a). They further state that Türkiye is protecting its inherit rights and are stopping steps that are trying to infringe upon those rights. Similarly, two additional statements from the period discuss these rights. The first of these statements is from 2020, in which Türkiye again explains that they are working to protect their interests (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2020b). The other only briefly mentions these rights but claim that the state is proactively trying to reach a settlement with their adversaries (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2021a). This sentiment is similarly echoed in another statement where they mention that Turkish attempts at reaching a settlement has been met with escalating actions (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2022a).

The maximalist claim also makes it reappearance in three additional statements (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2020c; 2022a; 2022b). Two of these statements bring further light on the Turkish view of Greece, as they note that the country is continuously violating international law and using the EU to further their interests (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2022a; 2022b). These statements show that the Turkish
side views the Greek side as proactive. However, in a statement regarding to the Turkish activity in the Eastern Mediterranean, Türkiye instead takes a clear proactive stance in which they announce the restart of activities in their proclaimed maritime zones and proclaim that Greece must enter negotiations with them and abandon their claims in the Aegean Sea (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2020c).

5.1.2 Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs on the Eastern Mediterranean Sea

Some of the previously mentioned statements from the Aegean section also refer to the Eastern Mediterranean in identical ways (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2019a; 2020a; 2020b; 2021a; 2022a; 2022b). As such, the same conclusions that were drawn in the previous section also apply here. The only notable new information is that one statement exemplifies the perceived Greek maximalist claim by using the island of Kastellorizo and the Greek objections over Turkish drilling close to their coast (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2020b). As naturally could be assumed, the Eastern Mediterranean maritime claims are given more attention in the chosen period compared to the Aegean dispute.

In 2019, many statements revolve around the activities taken by Türkiye in the claimed EEZ of Cyprus. The rhetoric used about the maritime dispute is in many ways identical to that which discussed in the Aegean. Firstly, Türkiye again specifies that they are acting to protect their rights and interests (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2019b; 2019c; 2019d; 2019e; 2019f). Out of these statements, three are more proactive (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2019c; 2019e; 2019f). In one statement, the proactive position is displayed as Türkiye wants to protect its interests but refuses to negotiate with Cyprus to do so (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2019e). The second statement calls to protect their interests and to respond to any attempt from the EU in
preventing this (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2019c). This statement therefore takes a proactive stance in the dispute, but a reactive stance to the EU. The last statement takes a proactive stance both in protecting their interests and in launching negotiations (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2019f). Lastly, while another statement takes a proactive stance, it is also represented as the only way forward since Cyprus refuses to cooperate (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2019d).

The statements from 2020 again mainly revolve around rights (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2020a; 2020d; 2020e; 2020f) and about opinions over maximalism (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2020a; 2020f; 2020g). One of the statements gives a good insight into the Turkish motivations. In response to a united statement from states such as Greece and Egypt, it is written that their response shows that Türkiye was right to act as it did and that it must be included in any projects in the region (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2020d). What this statement shows, is that while Türkiye is not always reactive, they are instead proactive to bypass the potential actions of the other states. Finally, two statements from 2021 says that the main causes for increased tension is Greece and Cyprus because of their actions and maximalist claims (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2021b; 2021c).

5.1.3 Conclusions drawn from the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs

There are a couple of notable patterns and conclusions that can be drawn from the foreign ministry. Firstly, the matter of sovereignty is an important motivation for the Turkish side. Türkiye often says that the Greek claim is maximalist and usurps the rights of their state. The statements from the foreign ministry more often uses sovereignty as something that needs to be protected rather than expanded. It is therefore not Türkiye which has
expanded its territorial claims, but that the Greek claims just happen to overlap with the claims and inherit rights of Türkiye.

At a quick glance, the Turkish motivations do not necessarily seem to revolve around clear security dilemmas. They are not acting to defend the state and territory against adversaries, but instead to secure or protect their rights and interests. At the same time, the Turkish statements vary between taking a proactive or security enhancing stance. Sometimes they seem to act in response to maximalist claims from their adversaries and sometimes just to secure their interests. While they often say that they are acting to protect their interests, which would imply that they are taking a reactive role, this does not always seem to be the case.

Through many of the statements, Turkish action often seems to be proactive in taking charge when it comes to securing their rights. This creates a confusing situation in which Türkiye seem to act both proactively and reactively at the same time. This discrepancy can potentially be explained through one of the last statements about the Eastern Mediterranean. In it, Türkiye says that their actions were proven to have been correct in response to a statement from countries such as Greece, Cyprus, and Egypt (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2020d). It almost seems as if Türkiye acts proactively based upon what it believes other countries can do, even before they have done anything. The underlying Turkish motivations therefore seem to be to secure their rights and sovereignty before other states have the chance to act against them. At the same, they also seem somewhat open to negotiate, however as they also demand states to drop their maximalist attitudes, it is unclear if this means that they are ready to make concessions or if it is another way of simply securing their interests. Before making a clear conclusion regarding the Turkish stance, the next will also analyse material from the president.
5.1.4 Presidency of the republic of Türkiye on the Aegean Sea

As with the MFA, the office of the president similarly pays attention to their inherit rights and interests (Presidency of the republic of Türkiye 2019a; 2019b; 2019c; 2019d). The first three take a reactive stance in which Türkiye should act to stop international attempts to usurp its sovereign rights (Presidency of the republic of Türkiye 2019a; 2019b; 2019c). The final statement outlines that Türkiye must act so that other states do not take advantage of its interests (Presidency of the republic of Türkiye 2019d). In this statement, the conflict is not only represented as a question of sovereign rights, but also as an existential security issue in which the foreign policy choices they made serves to ensure the survival of the Turkish people. This statement proposes proactive action to avoid catastrophe. A final statement proclaims that Türkiye must play a part in their extended neighbourhood to maintain peace and security for the state and its allies (Presidency of the republic of Türkiye 2019e). They further distance themselves from others who would engage in exploiting or attacking others.

The statements from 2020 differ in many ways from both the statements from 2019 and from the ministry of foreign affairs. In many ways, they follow the statement about the survival of the Turkish people. In one such statement, it is said that the country is under threat from the Aegean and that those who are against Turkish steps to preserve their sovereignty are instead against the very existence of Turks and Muslims (Presidency of the republic of Türkiye 2020a). Another statement again says that Turkish policy serves to protect its rights and future while simultaneously making references to Turkish history (Presidency of the republic of Türkiye 2020b). Specifically, the treaty of Sevres is mentioned while the loss of the Greek islands is said to be the cause of their problems in the Aegean. The treaty of Sevres was the treaty that dissolved the Ottoman empire and left the new Turkish state as small and weak (Turkey’s unfinished war with the West 2020). It is further claimed that unnamed forces are trying to do a repeat of the Sevres treaty
today and take away their rights (Presidency of the republic of Türkiye 2020b).

An even stronger proactive stance is shown in another statement where it is written that Erdogan has said that Türkiye will get everything which belongs to it and that the actions taken by others that go against this could lead to their devastation (Presidency of the republic of Türkiye 2020c). At the same time, he said that Türkiye is not interested in anyone else’s rights or land. This sentiment is repeated where it is also said that Türkiye is ready to collaborate with their neighbours (Presidency of the republic of Türkiye 2020d). These steps have however not been reciprocated from Greece who instead wants to cause problems (Presidency of the republic of Türkiye 2021a). Another statement again relates the Aegean issue to Turkish national security (Presidency of the republic of Türkiye 2021b).

In 2021 it is further alleged that there is a united attack on Turks and Muslims by an unnamed enemy in areas such as the Aegean or even through the use of neo nazis (Presidency of the republic of Türkiye 2021c). Statements from 2022 again reiterates that Türkiye wants to protect their rights (Presidency of the republic of Türkiye 2022a; 2022b). Finally, the last statements take a potentially reactive stance, in that they say that Türkiye will respond to Greek action and that Greece should not repeat their mistakes from the past in a possible reference to the Turkish war of independence (Presidency of the republic of Türkiye 2022b; 2022c).

5.1.5 Presidency of the republic of Türkiye on the Eastern Mediterranean Sea

As with the MFA, some of the presidential statements are also about the Eastern Mediterranean Sea and have the same conclusions (Presidency of the republic of Türkiye 2019a; 2019b; 2019c; 2020a; 2020b). Additionally, similar motives reappear. Many statements pertain to protect the interests and
rights of Türkiye (Presidency of the republic of Türkiye 2019f; 2019g). One of these statements presents the issue as a reaction to steps taken by Cyprus (Presidency of the republic of Türkiye 2019f). Another is instead more proactive, in which Türkiye says that the state shall continue drilling without any interruptions (Presidency of the republic of Türkiye 2019h). Another statement instead places emphasis on the economic gains that can be gained through cooperation (Presidency of the republic of Türkiye 2019b).

As with the Aegean, security related aspects also appear (Presidency of the republic of Türkiye 2019i; 2019j). The first of these statements merely refer to the actions against Türkiye in the area as a threat (Presidency of the republic of Türkiye 2019i). The other, however follows up on previous statements by calling the situation in the Eastern Mediterranean as a matter of survival for the Turkish people (Presidency of the republic of Türkiye 2019j). A final statement from 2019 explains that Türkiye has long been left out from projects in the region and that they cannot be excluded when it comes to achieving peace and stability in the region (Presidency of the republic of Türkiye 2019k). While this statement does not say that Türkiye acted reactively when they signed the agreement, it does show that the country believes that it is being excluded and that other states have been able to advance their policies in the meanwhile.

In 2020, economic motivations were more prevalent when discussing the eastern mediterranean (Presidency of the republic of Türkiye 2020b; 2020e; 2020f). This is shown as it is written that Erdogan is protecting the rights of Türkiye and that they are entitled to their large quantities of oil and gas (Presidency of the republic of Türkiye 2020b). Another statement similarly claims that Türkiye wants to become a global energy hub and that the steps taken in the area will help with this (Presidency of the republic of Türkiye 2020e). This statement is also claims that Turkish action allowed the country to bypass potential traps that its enemies were going to set up against them. Another aspect which reappears in is regards to the rights of other states,
where it is said that Türkiye only seeks to protect their rights and not encroach on the rights of others (Presidency of the republic of Türkiye 2020g). The presidency writes that Erdogan is open to negotiate and cooperate to reach a solution as the only obstacle for stability and peace is the maximalist demands of Greece and Cyprus.

The concept of exclusion also appears again, both from local adversaries but also from broader, interrelated (Presidency of the republic of Türkiye 2020h; 2020i; 2020j). One of the statements takes a reactive stance, where it is said that all activities which exclude Türkiye are doomed to fail (Presidency of the republic of Türkiye 2020i). Another of the statements about exclusion also make references to existential security issues as it states that those who are against Türkiye today are trying to impose a Sevres situation upon the Turkish waters (Presidency of the republic of Türkiye 2020h). This statement also directly refers to the Turkish seas as their blue homeland, in an apparent reference to the previously mentioned doctrine. These security concerns are further reiterated where it is written that someone is trying to remove Türkiye from regions such as the Eastern Mediterranean or Iraq (Presidency of the republic of Türkiye 2020k). A similar argument is used in regard to Cypriot policy, where it is alleged that Greece and Cyprus has been trying to confine Türkiye to its southern coast (Presidency of the republic of Türkiye 2020l).

The last statement on exclusion is notable as it not only paints the exclusion as a local issue, but as a coordinated attack on Türkiye like the events from 100 years ago (Presidency of the republic of Türkiye 2020j). Greece and its allies are also accused of having a colonial mentality in which they value human life and stability as lesser than money (Presidency of the republic of Türkiye 2020f). The document makes a clear distinction between their mentality and the stability which persisted during the Ottoman era which was referred to as Pax Ottomana. The statement directly compares the Turkish stance to Ottoman stability, implying that Türkiye’s position is the only one that will lead to peace. While many statements have focused on the rights of
Türkiye or their security concerns, one instead represents the conflict very differently. In it, the stances taken by Türkiye are said to have been taken for the country to become a global powerhouse (Presidency of the republic of Türkiye 2020m). This statement takes a definite proactive stance and introduces a new motive which has not been discussed before.

This proactive stance is elaborated upon in two additional statements (Presidency of the republic of Türkiye 2021d; 2022d). The first of these statements say that Türkiye is acting and displaying their will over their outside borders in places such as the Eastern Mediterranean (Presidency of the republic of Türkiye 2021d). The second statement says that Türkiye has grown strong and that it can now freely promote its own interests (Presidency of the republic of Türkiye 2022d).

5.1.6 Turkish motivations behind the maritime border disputes

The presidency of Türkiye both reinforces the previous assumptions and adds to them. The presidency places more attention on economic gains then the ministry of foreign affairs did. This is especially true when talking about the Eastern Mediterranean. The previous speculation that Türkiye acts prematurely to secure their interests is backed up by statements in which the Turkish policy is represented as securing the future of the state and its people. References to the Sevres agreement reinforces this thought, as it shows that there is a fear of losing their rights and territory like they did in the past. The analysis of the presidency further shows that this way of acting has taken on a clearer security dimension in which policy choices are often described as vital in protecting the territory of the country and even the very survival of its population. The Turkish stance regarding the dispute is therefore at its core represented as an existential security concern that could endanger their people.
At the same time, other documents instead show the proactive actions as serving other causes. The most important of these is the statement which instead says that Turkish policy is aimed at making the state into a global power. This position is also backed up by other statements which shows that Türkiye is also acting to advance their national interests and not merely their security. Similarly, the statement about Pax Ottomana represents that the Turkish position is the only possible future which guarantees stability in the region. This perspective muddies the previous assumptions regarding the questions of rights and sovereignty. Throughout both sources, it has been claimed that Türkiye do not claim territory from others, but merely seeks to protect their own. A security related reading of this perspective shows that Türkiye wants to protect their territories out of fear of them being stolen or taken advantage of by their adversaries. A hegemonic reading of it instead gives the impression that they are keen to either protect or expand their waters because of their national interests and growing power.

Both readings have support in the statement in which they wanted to prevent another Sevres in their blue homeland. This can either be read as Türkiye wanting to keep their territories safe, or as them wanting to keep their new claims and interests safe. The specific mention of blue homeland corresponds to the doctrine of the same name, in which Turkish expansionism is proposed. However, it is also possible that both the security and hegemonic perspectives are informative of the underlying Turkish motivations. The country could act from a place of fear while also deeming it necessary to increase their future might and geopolitical position. Especially if the country is a growing power, it might be possible that it exists in a transitional period between being reactive and security enhancing or proactive and working to achieve their goals. As it stands, the study can not give a definite answer on this debate.
5.2 Greek motivations regarding the maritime border dispute

5.2.1 Prime minister of the Hellenic republic on the Aegean Sea

In 2019 there is one important mention of the Aegean dispute on the website of the Greek prime minister and two that are more unclear. In the prime minister’s speech at the UN, he alleges that Greece has taken a proactive role when it comes building cooperation and stability, but that these steps are hindered by state actions that are contrary to the international law of the sea and those that dispute the sovereignty of Greece in their sea and air (Prime minister of the Hellenic republic 2019a). These steps are in direct reference to Türkiye. Two mentions of the conflict are more unclear (Prime minister of the Hellenic republic 2019b; 2019c) as they only vaguely refer to a conflict in the Aegean and could therefore potentially refer to the migration crisis (Prime minister of the Hellenic republic 2019b) rather than the border dispute. Nevertheless, both statements partly revolve around security issues. The first statement presents the current situation as an issue that could escalate into conflict (Prime minister of the Hellenic republic 2019b). The other statement instead says that Greece has entered into a security agreement with the United States as their country’s sovereignty and rights are in danger (Prime minister of the Hellenic republic 2019c). This statement seems to have implied a reactive role.

Statements from 2020 present the Aegean dispute and Turkish actions as a security issue (Prime minister of the Hellenic republic 2020a; 2020b; 2020c). In fact, one statement goes so far as to call Turkish policy imperialistic (Prime minister of the Hellenic republic 2020a). This stance is strengthened as Türkiye outright questioned the ownership of many Greek islands (Prime minister of the Hellenic republic 2022a). Greece alleges that they are open to cooperate and that it is Türkiye which instead choses to escalate (Prime minister of the Hellenic republic 2020a). Additional statements elaborate that
they are open to negotiate or even go to the international courts with Türkiye if they cannot solve the issue themselves (Prime minister of the Hellenic republic 2020b). At the same time, it is mentioned that Greece has called for a European meeting because of Turkish actions. Other statements also show that Greece is trying to make their disputes into a European or NATO issue (Prime minister of the Hellenic republic 2020c; 2020d).

One statement builds upon this idea as it specifies that Greece has used the EU to gradually increase pressure on Türkiye when they act unilaterally (Prime minister of the Hellenic republic 2020d). This was so that Greece could stop Turkish developments and bring them to the negotiating table. Lastly, a final statement discusses the aspect of sovereignty in the Aegean, where Greece sees the expansion of their territorial seas to 12 nautical miles as a question of national sovereignty (Prime minister of the Hellenic republic 2020e). However, it is also noted that Greece has not been able to do so. They have not been able to change the status quo.

5.2.2 Prime minister of the Hellenic republic on the Eastern Mediterranean Sea

Some previous statements about the Aegean also apply for the Eastern Mediterranean (Prime minister of the Hellenic republic 2019a; 2019c; 2020a; 2020b; 2020d). In one of the previously covered statements, it is also written that Greece and Cyprus are victims of Turkish violations and that they are going to coordinate with the EU to stop the Turkish actions (Prime minister of the Hellenic republic 2019b). The last statement from 2019 says that Greece is using its allies to protect its sovereign rights and those of its islands (Prime minister of the Hellenic republic 2019d). Another statement similarly says that Greece is going act against Türkiye through the EU if Turkish action keeps escalating (Prime minister of the Hellenic republic 2020e). In a meeting with the American secretary of state Mike Pomeo, the dispute is mentioned as a vital security concern that also impacts American strategic
interests (Prime minister of the Hellenic republic 2020f). Further statements again outline that Greece sees the actions of Türkiye as destabilising and a cause for insecurity (Prime minister of the Hellenic republic 2020g).

The Turkish actions are also described as usurping the rights of Greece, such as via their agreement with Libya (Prime minister of the Hellenic republic 2020h; 2020i). In fact, after signing the maritime border agreement with Egypt, it is specifically written that the accord gave Greece rights over their seas (Prime minister of the Hellenic republic 2020j). The agreement was also noted as being a response to previous Turkish actions in the region. The Greek stance on the conflict does also seem to take a proactive stance in their regional alliance building process as they have entered a partnership with states such as Israel for defence cooperation and the Eastmed gas pipeline (Prime minister of the Hellenic republic 2020g).

The pipeline is mentioned as both being economically important for Greece as well to increase cooperation in the region (Prime minister of the Hellenic republic 2020k). It is specifically noted that the construction of the pipeline will increase the role played by Greece in the region. While it is said that all parties, including Türkiye can join the partnership, this has not happened because of Turkish provocations (Prime minister of the Hellenic republic 2020a). In 2021, it was reiterated that Greece was going to deepen their alliance to these states (Prime minister of the Hellenic republic 2021). The proactive Greek stance surrounding the Eastmed pipeline and the potential for natural resources can also be seen during the Russian-Ukrainian war in which Greece positioned itself as a way to potentially diversify from a dependence on Russian oil (Prime minister of the Hellenic republic 2022b; 2022c).
5.2.3 Conclusions drawn from the Prime minister of the Hellenic republic

By analysing the statements from the prime minister of the Hellenic republic, the paper can make a couple of observations. Firstly, the Greek stance regarding the border dispute and Türkiye is often represented as either a security concern or as them protecting their interests. These security concerns are sometimes discussed as a worry about escalating tensions that can lead to conflict. The security motivations also extend towards territorial integrity, as Türkiye has challenged their ownership of the Greek islands. At the same time, the material has also shown that the Greek position is often security enhancing rather than proactive. Many of their stances do not challenge the status quo, but instead seeks to minimise security concerns caused by Türkiye. Even regarding matters such as the length of the Greek territorial sea, which is noted as a matter of national sovereignty, Greece takes a reactive stance in which they do not change the status quo even if they see it as their right to do so.

Another notable dimension of Greek policy about the disputed borders is their insistence on cooperation and alliances. This has both been used reactively to deter Türkiye and diminish security concerns, but also proactively when it comes to economic and political cooperation in the Eastern Mediterranean. The latter form of cooperation seems to have been used to further Greek interests in developing its potential as a resource powerhouse. It has also allowed them to enter into defence agreements with states such as Israel. While this policy decision is noted to not be aimed towards excluding Türkiye, in practise the increase of regional cooperation has taken place without the involvement of Türkiye.
5.2.4 Hellenic republic ministry of foreign affairs on the Aegean Sea

To begin with, the foreign ministry also represents the Aegean dispute as a matter of protecting their sovereignty and territorial integrity (Hellenic republic ministry of foreign affairs 2019a). It also reiterates the position that Turkish actions could result in a destructive accident (Hellenic republic ministry of foreign affairs 2019b). Additionally, another statement show that Greece feels threatened by Türkiye and that they are trying to turn this feeling of insecurity into a united European security concern (Hellenic republic ministry of foreign affairs 2019c). The diplomatic efforts of Greece are also expanded upon, as it is explained that the country has built up their diplomatic channels to counteract Turkish escalations (Hellenic republic ministry of foreign affairs 2019b). In fact, the foreign ministry mentions that Türkiye tries to exert its will using force but that they are failing to do so because of the diplomatic moves taken by Greece (Hellenic republic ministry of foreign affairs 2019d). The Greek stance is not just about deterrence, as Greece seeks to increase its role in their vicinity (Hellenic republic ministry of foreign affairs 2019e). A statement from 2020 again reiterates the proactive Greek policy as it is mentioned that the country is making its positions into international ones (Hellenic republic of foreign affairs 2020a).

5.2.5 Hellenic republic ministry of foreign affairs on the Eastern Mediterranean Sea

The Greek position regarding the Eastern Mediterranean Sea has many similarities with their motivations behind the Aegean dispute. Firstly, it again related to matters of rights and sovereignty (Hellenic republic ministry of foreign affairs 2019f). Greece’s proactive role in forging alliances is also again mentioned as both an economic motive and as a way to deter Türkiye (Hellenic republic ministry of foreign affairs 2019g; 2019h). Under the new Greek government, the state further aims to assert their influence in order to both have a voice on regional issues and to preserve the stability of the
region (Hellenic republic ministry of foreign affairs 2019i). Another statement elaborates that Greece aims to create stability through cooperation (Hellenic republic ministry of foreign affairs 2019j). As with the previous sources, it is made clear that Greece also uses its membership in the EU to influence the decisions taken by the organisation (Hellenic republic ministry of foreign affairs 2019k). The Turkish moves are again also mentioned as a cause for insecurity and instability (Hellenic republic ministry of foreign affairs 2020b). Lastly, one statement directly mentions that Greece has taken a proactive stance in chasing its rights (Hellenic republic ministry of foreign affairs 2020c).

5.2.6 Greek motivations behind the maritime border disputes

The statements from the ministry of foreign affairs are in many ways identical to the ones from the prime minister. It confirms that Greece sees the dispute as a matter of sovereignty and security. This view about Türkiye has been shown to directly impact decisions taken by Greece, especially regarding their cooperation schemes with both European and regional allies. Statements from both Greek sources have therefore shown that Greece does try to keep the status quo and is security enhancing rather than proactive. However, other statements counteract this claim and show that the country also seeks to expand its reach and role in the region. This role is seemingly not just related to economic gains, but also to expand the influence of Greece on regional issues in general. As such, while certain stances might have been taken in response to Türkiye, it was the proactive policies of Greece that allowed them to take these stances in the first place. This can clearly be seen regarding the maritime border agreement with Egypt, which was both a reaction to Türkiye and a result of the new diplomatic ties between the states. The underlying Greek motivations behind the conflict can therefore both be seen as a matter of protecting their sovereignty and security, but also as a way for the state to flex its interests and use their newfound allies to strengthen their position in the region.
6 Conclusions

The paper has analysed the underlying motives which influenced the political stance and policies of Greece and Türkiye regarding their maritime border dispute in the period 2019-2022. Since the countries had nearly gone to war over this dispute multiple times, it is important to understand the conflict to have any hopes of solving it. The paper was conducted using the general theory of foreign policy which claims that states act according to the current status quo. They can either be security enhancing and attempt to preserve the status quo or be proactive and try to change it. Usually, stronger states are more likely to be proactive. Previous research showed that Greece has traditionally been the weaker state but has acted both proactively and reactively. The research also showed that it was likely that sovereignty, economic motives, and security dilemmas were likely to impact the policies of both states.

The paper was conducted through a qualitative content analysis which aimed to investigate how the conflict had been represented by both states to discern their motivations. The analysis was conducted using material collected from government institutions in both states. Based upon the previous literature, the paper hypothesized that security, sovereignty, and economic motives were likely to be the main driving motivations in both the Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean Seas, but that economic dimensions were more likely to play a part in the Eastern Mediterranean. The analysis mostly confirmed the assumed hypotheses, however, the third hypothesis which assumed that economic motivates would be prevalent proved to be false. This is because the economic motivations only played a part in the Eastern Mediterranean and were not present in Aegean dispute.

The study showed that security concerns played a significant role for both states, as they were distrustful of each other and considered the actions of the
other as threatening. The analysis further showed that these security concerns differed widely between the states. While Greece seems to consider Türkiye as a threat, Türkiye instead seem to view their stance in the conflict as a matter of survival. It is often reiterated by the Turkish government that outside forces are trying to collaborate to destroy the Turkish state and nation. Both states often act reactively against each other to deter the other from changing the status quo. While Turkish deterrence is usually direct, Greece instead uses its membership in the EU and regional alliances to stop Türkiye. The states do not only act reactively to protect their security, but also proactively. Greece’s strong regional alliances seemed to partly have been built as a way for the country to build a strong defence against potential adversaries. Similarly, the analysis showed that Türkiye often acts proactively to get ahead of its regional adversaries so that they can not try to advance their positions.

The questions of sovereignty and sovereign rights also played a significant role behind the actions of both countries. Both Greece and Türkiye often proclaim that they want to protect their rights and interests against the other. Economic motives were also present, especially for Greece who often said that they wanted the country to become a regional hub for energy and to use the hydrocarbons of the sea to become wealthier. While the study showed that Greece in general tended to be more reactive than Türkiye, they often seemed to have taken a more proactive approach when it comes to securing their economic interests in the sea. Greece also acted proactively in gathering allies so that it could become a bigger regional player. However, Greece more often seemed to act in reaction to Türkiye rather than on its own. This is notable in cases such as their border agreement with Egypt which was only signed after Türkiye signed one with Libya. They also chose not to expand their interests in certain areas because of their position.

Türkiye seems to have taken a more proactive approach were they not only wish to become a regional player, but also a global one. Many of their
actions seemed to proactively try to change the status quo in their favour. This was exemplified when the country proclaimed that the only workable form of stability was the one it proposed. A form of stability that was directly compared to how the region functioned when it was owned by the Turkish Ottoman empire. However, the analysis was not able to show if Türkiye mainly acted to advance their positions, if they instead acted out of genuine fear of their adversaries, or if their position is somewhere in between.

The paper has shown how different motivates have impacted both states and leaves room for further research. Additional studies could elaborate on the Turkish position and in detail analyse if they are more likely to act out of fear or for hegemonic reasons. As this study has not accounted for factors such as propaganda, this could serve as an interesting compliment when analysing the statements of both governments. This can show if the conflict is represented in certain ways more so because it serves the interests of the states more than being informative of their national positions. Nevertheless, the paper has been able to analyse large amounts of material and shown which motives are the likely drives behind the maritime birder disputes. Lastly, it can also be interesting to conduct a similar analysis with material from previous years as this can not only show how the conflict has developed, but also how this relates the current positions taken by the states. For example, was Türkiye more reactive in the past and was this a reason as to why they act more proactively now? Or was Greece more proactive?

The study has shown that the states have vital concerns regarding their maritime disputes and that they are unlikely to act together for regional stability. At the same time, both states have said that they are willing to collaborate with each other. This shows that while they are far apart on many issues, there is still a chance for them to cooperate and talk through their issues. For this to happen, measures first need to be taken that can identify common ground between the states that can serve as the foundation stones for further cooperative development. This is especially needed when it comes
to creating workable security guarantees between the states so that they can more easily work through their other disagreements.

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