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Greece's Statement delivered
by His Excellency Mr. Kyriakos Mitsotakis
Prime Minister of the Hellenic Republic

Excellencies,

Dear colleagues,

Let me begin by thanking you all for your participation in today's discussion. I would also like to thank our briefers for their excellent contributions.

And I do believe that is a particularly timely discussion, and it is a great honour, as prime Minister of Greece to be chairing today's debate.

As we heard from our briefers, new technologies are transforming the way we navigate, the way we trade, the way we protect our seas. They offer remarkable opportunities, but they also create substantial new vulnerabilities.

Yet, as we consider these developments, we must not lose sight of a more fundamental issue: respect for the rules that govern our seas.

We have built a rules-based international order for a reason: because we understood that the adherence to these common rules is the foundation of peace, stability and shared prosperity. And nowhere is this more evident than at sea.

The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, with 172 parties and fundamental provisions reflecting customary international law binding for all States, stands out, I believe, as one of the greatest achievements of multilateralism.

It provides the comprehensive legal framework governing activities at sea, safeguarding freedom of navigation, protecting the sovereign rights of States and enabling global maritime trade to flourish.

But international law cannot be upheld selectively. And the rules governing our seas cannot be rewritten to accommodate the ambitions of individual States.

This is particularly important at a time when we face threats to maritime security not only from non-State actors, but also from States that openly disregard international law.

Let me give you a concrete example from our own region, the Eastern Mediterranean.

The so-called Türkiye-Libya Memorandum on maritime delimitation is a flagrant violation of the fundamental principles of the international law of the sea. It is illegal. It is arbitrary. And it defies geography itself.

Greece and Libya are natural neighbours, with opposite coasts. They are entitled under international law of the sea to delimit their respective maritime zones through an agreement.

By contrast, Türkiye and Libya do not, I repeat, do not have opposite or adjacent coasts. Yet they have attempted to establish an artificial maritime boundary between them. This is absurd. There is no precedent, let me repeat again, there is no precedent for such a diagonal delimitation.

Allow me to illustrate this with a map.

I would just like you to look at the geography.

Türkiye and Libya have attempted to essentially draw a maritime boundary between them as if the Greek islands lying between their coasts simply did not exist.

Many of you have visited these islands. Crete, my own ancestral homeland, is one of the largest islands in the Mediterranean. It has more than 620,000 inhabitants. Rhodes is home to another 125,000 people. And the islands of Karpathos and Kasos, have tens of thousands more.

These are not uninhabited rocks in the middle of the sea. They are thriving communities, with centuries of history, vibrant economies, with hundreds of thousands of people who call them home.

And yet, this Memorandum simply pretends that they do not exist.

But geography cannot be rewritten. And sovereign rights cannot be erased by drawing arbitrary lines on a map.

The Mediterranean is shared by 21 coastal States. Maritime boundaries are meant to delimitate neighbouring States, not simply between friends.

The maritime delimitation agreement concluded between Greece and Egypt in 2020 stands as a model of how neighbouring states can reach mutually

agreed solutions in full accordance with international law. Greece and Egypt have opposite coasts.

Without respect for common rules, our Mare Nostrum risks becoming a jungle of competing claims and self-serving arrangements.

Imagine Greece and Tunisia deciding to delimit their maritime zones as if Sicily and Malta simply did not exist.

Would anyone seriously consider such an arrangement as legitimate?

International law is absolutely clear. Islands are entitled to maritime zones, including a continental shelf and an exclusive economic zone, in accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea whose relevant provisions, let me repeat, reflect customary law binding all States.

No agreement between two States can deprive a third State of its sovereign rights. And no bilateral arrangement can override international law.

The Türkiye–Libya Memorandum unfortunately violates these fundamental principles. It has no legal effect on Greece's sovereign rights.

And its recent ratification by the Libyan House of Representatives cannot turn an illegal memorandum into a lawful agreement.

And this is not merely Greece’s position.

The illegality of this Memorandum has been clearly recognized by the international community, including all 27 Member States of the European Union, some of which are represented around this table.

And no matter how much time passes and how often unlawful claims are repeated, what is illegal remains illegal.

And this is not simply a bilateral dispute.

It goes to the very heart of our discussions around maritime security.

It challenges the foundations of multilateralism, threatens regional peace and stability, and undermines the rules that protect the rights of all States, whether they are large and small.

And for more than four decades, the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea has been able to provide a common framework for peaceful coexistence, cooperation and the settlement of maritime disputes.

We cannot allow our seas to become a jungle, where States pick and choose which rules to respect, and where arbitrary claims replace international law.

And as the UN Secretary-General emphasized in addressing this very issue, we must ensure that the force of law prevails over the law of force.

Because the alternative to a rules-based international order is not freedom. It is chaos, it is confrontation, it is instability.

And this is precisely what the United Nations was created to prevent.

The consequences of this illegal Memorandum are not merely legal. They are very real.

And under no circumstances can this Memorandum serve as a pretext to challenge legitimate activities at sea or obstruct strategic connectivity projects that our region urgently needs.

And these are projects, especially when we talk about the eastern Mediterranean, of enormous strategic and economic importance. They promise greater energy security, more affordable electricity, stronger regional cooperation, better data connectivity, ultimately, they contribute to lasting peace.

Yet their development is being complicated by unilateral claims and attempts to challenge legitimate activities at sea.

And this is precisely why maritime security matters.

We cannot, around this table, speak of building bridges between our nations while allowing others to prevent those bridges from being built.

And we cannot allow arbitrary maritime claims to become instruments for holding back the economic development and prosperity of an entire region.

Ladies and gentemen,

What is at stake in the eastern Mediterranean is part of a much broader challenge. One that affects not only international peace and security, but also the prosperity and everyday lives of billions of people.

It was mentioned by our briefers, more than 80 per cent of global merchandise trade, by volume, travels by sea.

Ships carry the energy that powers our economies, the food that feeds our populations and the goods that connect our markets.

And it is an illusion to believe that alternative land routes could replace maritime trade on such a scale.

This extraordinary system of global trade and commerce has been one of the greatest engines of global prosperity and technological progress.

But its success rests on one fundamental condition: that maritime routes remain open, free and secure.

And today, unfortunately that condition can no longer be taken for granted.

From the Strait of Hormuz to the Red Sea. From the Black Sea to other critical maritime chokepoints.

Just yesterday, another commercial cargo vessel, owned by a Greek company was attacked and sank in the Black Sea. We strongly condemn this attack.

Targeted civilian commercial shipping is completely unacceptable.

It is yet another reminder for the urgent need for a global maritime truce ensuring that commercial vessels can navigate safely and freely even in times of conflict.

Because the consequences of such attacks extend far beyond the seas.

Threats to freedom of navigation disrupt global supply chains, they drive up shipping and insurance costs and create uncertainty across international markets.

Ultimately, it is our citizens who pay the price.

At a time when households are already struggling with the cost of living, maritime insecurity adds further pressure on energy and commodity prices, it fuels inflation, it aggravates food insecurity.

And as we heard from our briefers, these new technologies are making these challenges even more complex.

The cost of disruption unfortunately has never been so low. And the potential economic consequences have rarely been so high.

And this brings us also to Europe's responsibility.

Europe cannot aspire to be a global economic power while remaining a spectator when the security of its trade routes are at stake.

We must be prepared as Europeans to assume greater responsibility for security and stability in our wider neighbourhood.

And this means deploying hard assets, strengthening our operational capabilities and being ready to act when freedom of navigation is threatened.

The European Union's operation ASPIDES in the Red Sea, in which Greece plays a leading role, is a concrete example of what Europe can and must do.

But we must be more ambitious.

Europe's economic strength must be matched by its capacity to act. We need a stronger European security presence in our wider region, working closely with our partners.

Because protecting maritime security means safeguarding the prosperity of our citizens, the resilience of our economies and, ultimately, the foundations of international peace and stability.

Excellencies,

While new technologies create vulnerabilities, they also offer unprecedented opportunities.

Artificial intelligence, satellites, advanced sensors can transform maritime surveillance, improve early warning and strengthen our ability to prevent and respond to threats.

But technology alone unfortunately is not a strategy. We must turn information into intelligence, and intelligence into effective action.

And this is precisely the approach, as you heard form Mr. Bletsas, that Greece is pursuing.

We are a major maritime nation. We are investing in advanced surveillance and command-and-control capabilities, we are integrating satellites, sensors and vessel-tracking systems to build a comprehensive, real-time picture of maritime activity.

But no country can safeguard the seas alone.

We need stronger international cooperation, between like-minded states, we need better information-sharing as we heard from Fareed Zakaria, we need greater investment in maritime capabilities, while ensuring that emerging technologies remain firmly anchored in international law.

And as Greece prepares to assume the Presidency of the Council of the European Union in the second half of 2027, maritime security will remain very high on our agenda.

Let me conclude, Ladies and Gentlemen, by saying the following.

The sea can connect us. But it can also divide us. It can be a bridge between nations, a source of prosperity, or an arena of confrontation and conflict.

Which path we take is ultimately our choice. The choice begins with respect for international law.

For Greece, a nation which is shaped by the sea, with thousands of islands and the world's largest merchant fleet, this is a matter of vital importance.

Freedom of navigation depends on maritime security. And maritime security depends on the respect for international law. They underpin global trade, prosperity and peace.

And as Greece approaches the end of its term on the Security Council, let me reaffirm our commitment.

Greece will remain a steadfast defender of international law and freedom of navigation, working with all partners to keep our seas open, secure and peaceful.

Because what happens at sea shapes the future of all of us.

Thank you.