



Council of the
European Union

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NOTE

From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	Delegations
Subject:	Turkish Illegal Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) Fishing in Greek territorial waters – Information from the Greek Delegation

Turkish IUU fishing in Greek territorial waters

Greece has taken substantial measures for the protection of fish stocks, by implementing the relevant provisions of EU legislation but also by establishing extensive protected areas, covering a substantial portion of Greek waters. The Greek Prime Minister recently announced an ambitious program to declare 30% of Greek waters marine protected areas, one third of which - 10% of Greek waters - will be areas of complete prohibition, that is “no-take reserves”, which are considered as the most effective tool for restoring and preserving biodiversity and enhancing the resilience of the marine ecosystem. However, our efforts to preserve fish stocks are hampered by Turkish IUU fishing in Greek waters, which is becoming a source of growing concern for Greece, where the fishing community and public opinion more generally increasingly perceive both national and EU authorities as incapable of protecting their basic rights.

Turkish fishing vessels systematically encroach into Greek territorial waters. Since 2017, there have been more than 3000 reported cases of Turkish IUU fishing in Greek territorial waters notified by the Greek Authorities to the European Commission. Systematic IUU fishing by Turkish vessels undermines efforts for the protection of the marine environment, the viability of fish stocks and subjects Greek and EU fishermen to unlawful competition because the Turkish fishing vessels do not abide by the regulations and standards applied to EU fishing vessels. Furthermore, this practice - of entering our territorial waters and targeting fish stocks where Greek fishermen have exclusive rights - increases the pressure to fish stocks and undermines our efforts to establish new protected zones and enhance the viability of the stocks, as their catches are unreported. The negative effects are multiplied by the fact that Turkish fishing vessels do not comply with the standards and restrictions applicable to EU fishing vessels and they pursue fishing activities with prohibited equipment and during periods not allowed for EU fishermen. This is a problem that applies to international waters as well, where fish stocks are also depleted by the increased pressure and these destructive practices. Often the product of these activities is then exported to EU markets, contributing even more to the unlawful competition with the Greek fishermen.

Obviously, Turkey's IUU fishing is not a bilateral issue between Greece and Turkey but a matter of common EU concern. Turkey's illegal behavior violates the principles of Common Fisheries Policy and challenges the EU's ability to protect the rights and interests of its Member States and fishermen.

In similar cases with other third countries, such as the United Kingdom and Norway, affecting the interests of the MS, the EU has taken an active and determined position. Experience has shown that indeed, EU unity, solidarity and resolve are the most effective means to ensure compliance of non-cooperative third actors and to ensure that they respect the rights of EU citizens and the sovereignty, rights and interests of Member states. A failure to respond effectively and particularly to apply the provisions of the Common Fisheries Policy concerning IUU fishing only serves to encourage the continuation of such illegal behavior, ultimately leading to a further exacerbation of tensions to the detriment of peace, security and good neighborly relations in our region and to a deterioration of relations with the EU.

Therefore, we expect that that the EU will deal with Turkey's IUU fishing in a similar way, defending the sovereign rights of all Member States and EU fishermen equally. Regulation 1005/2008 - and particularly its articles 25 and 26 - provide a clear framework for preventing, deterring and eliminating IUU fishing from third countries. Any lack of clarity and determination on the part of the EU will only encourage Turkey to escalate its provocations, creating a risk of permanent instability in the EU's southeastern flank and a breakdown in EU-Turkey relations.

Furthermore, the guidance provided by the Statement of the Members of the European Council of 25 March 2021 remains in force, according to which, in case of renewed provocations or unilateral actions in breach of international law on Turkey's part, the European Union is determined to use the instruments and options at its disposal to defend its interests and those of its MS as well as to uphold regional stability.
