



By: Tomorrow's Affairs Staff

Greece is shifting its approach – cooperation instead of isolation



Last week, Greece launched an initiative to establish a **cooperation framework** between Greece, Cyprus, Egypt, Turkey, and Libya, focussing on five specific areas: migration, marine environment protection, maritime borders, connectivity, and civil protection.

Prime Minister **Kyriakos Mitsotakis** presented the proposal in an address to parliament. The following day, the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs outlined the details of the proposal at a press conference—the participating countries and the five key areas—and the Cypriot news agency, CNA, reported that **Nicosia** had agreed to take part.

In a region that has operated for years through a mix of agreements, incidents and temporary calm, this is the first attempt to create a structure based not on conflict, but on a minimum of shared interests.

Although the framework has not yet been formalised, Athens has, for the first time, proposed a joint forum for Turkey and Libya – the countries with which it has the most serious maritime disputes.

This marks a shift in approach: from isolation to inclusion, based on the assumption that technical cooperation can occur without resolving political disagreements.

Until now, relations in the **Eastern Mediterranean** have been shaped by blocs – Athens, Nicosia and Cairo on one side, and Ankara and Tripoli on the other.

Unresolved issues over maritime zones and rights to exploit the seabed have constrained each arrangement. The "Five" introduces a new element: addressing technical issues separately from political disputes, even if only temporarily, and building operational cooperation in areas that require daily coordination.

From conflict to stability

The most tangible motive for Athens is **migration**. During the summer, there was a

sharp increase in arrivals via the Libyan route to the Greek islands, particularly south of Crete and around Gavdos.

These routes were considered secondary until last year. The Greek Coast Guard now maintains permanent operations in an area that was never part of the traditional Eastern Mediterranean route.

In this context, any structure that enables information exchange, joint search and rescue missions, or the involvement of civil protection has real, measurable value.

For Athens, this is a politically more advantageous framework than bilateral negotiations that remain at an impasse.

Turkey, meanwhile, has its own reasons for joining the format. After years in which disputes with Greece served Ankara as a domestic political tool, the Turkish leadership is now seeking to calm relations to create space for economic recovery and foreign investment.

The forthcoming fiscal consolidation and external debt require stability in the Aegean and the southern Mediterranean, at least on a technical level. Participating in a forum that includes Egypt and Libya allows Turkey to present itself as a rational actor rather than a disruptor.

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Ankara is not changing its policy but recognises that conflict with Athens no longer yields domestic benefits, while stability opens access to capital and political influence in the region.

Egypt is the third key pillar of the format. For years, Cairo has played a unique role as a mediator between opposing blocs. For **President Sisi**, this is an opportunity to further

consolidate his position as arbiter and to stabilise the southeastern Mediterranean, where energy and security interests intersect.

Egypt has a direct interest in curbing irregular migration and smuggling from Libya, as these routes cross its territorial belt.

Joining a format that includes both Ankara and Athens allows it to maintain communication with both sides and to leverage its political capital in the EU, particularly on migration issues.

Libya remains the most unpredictable element of the puzzle. The political dualism between Tripoli and Benghazi continues to make any international commitment conditional.

However, at this stage, both Western and Eastern governments are interested in participating in an arrangement that brings legitimacy and financial benefits.

The European Union has already signalled its willingness to finance joint projects in the fields of maritime protection and civil protection, creating opportunities for the inclusion of European funds in technical projects.

Libyan participants do not need to agree on borders, but they can share resources. In a country ravaged by crises, that is sufficient motivation.

The purpose of the '5×5' initiative

The real significance of the initiative lies in its potential to reduce the likelihood of incidents. In recent years, the region has been so saturated with parallel military activities and overlapping interests that any miscalculation at sea can quickly escalate into a diplomatic crisis or armed conflict.

Even minimal, loose coordination reduces the risk of miscalculation and unwanted encounters at sea. Such **incidents**, combined

with domestic political pressures, are the quickest route to escalation.

It is a pragmatic way for the EU to maintain influence in a region that has become too complex for formal negotiations

If "5×5" succeeds in establishing a mechanism for activity notification and operational data exchange, it will have achieved its purpose.

From the European Union's perspective, the format has additional appeal. It provides a channel for funding projects that are not formally classified as political, allowing Brussels to contribute to stability without becoming entangled in legal disputes over maritime borders.

It is a pragmatic way for the EU to maintain influence in a region that has become too complex for formal negotiations. Greece recognises this and will therefore seek to "frame" the forum in European terms: joint missions, coordination of civil protection, and environmental security. These are concepts that are acceptable both in Brussels and Ankara, as each party interprets them differently.

A region undergoing transformation

The key question now is whether Ankara will formally accept participation. Turkish diplomacy has so far responded cautiously, neither rejecting nor confirming involvement.

The signal from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Ankara was that "any regional mechanism that contributes to stability can be useful if it is not used to exclude others."

In other words, Turkey wants to retain the right of veto over the agenda. Athens, on the other hand, believes that Ankara's presence, even with limitations, is more valuable than a boycott. The first meeting at the ministerial

level, if it takes place in December, will test readiness for controlled cooperation.

It is not an attempt to rewrite history, but to create a space where everyday problems are addressed before they escalate into crises

Why has most of the world overlooked this politically significant initiative? Because the Eastern Mediterranean is commonly considered a collection of historical traumas and unresolved disputes.

In reality, the region is undergoing transformation. The energy landscape is changing, climate pressures are increasing, and migration from Africa and the Middle East is altering the security geography.

Under a layer of very concrete problems, the old divisions between North and South and Christian and Muslim countries are becoming increasingly blurred.

The "5×5" proposal is a symptom of this shift: it is not an attempt to rewrite history, but to create a space where everyday problems are addressed before they escalate into crises.

Continuity: what the Mediterranean lacks most

In the best-case scenario, this format could develop into a low-intensity operational platform – similar to arrangements in the Black Sea or North Atlantic, where joint exercises, data sharing, and task forces foster a habit of communication.

Habit here is more important than formal agreement. The Mediterranean is not a region where contracts endure, but it is a region where custom has the force of an institution.



Turkey could attempt to use the forum for political affirmation in Libya, while Cyprus could block progress if the issue of the northern part of the island is raised – Recep Tayyip Erdogan

If the countries of the region begin to communicate through technical channels, the need to raise every issue at the political level is reduced.

Of course, there are risks. Turkey could attempt to use the forum for political affirmation in Libya, while Cyprus could block progress if the issue of the northern part of the island is raised. Libyan factions could compete for the legitimacy of participation.

These are all realistic scenarios. Yet even then, the process would serve a useful function—it would provide a channel of communication that does not depend on government changes or daily crises. This is what the Mediterranean lacks most: continuity.

By launching the initiative, Greece is not seeking a historic agreement but aiming to establish a routine. In a region where every routine has so far meant only crisis, this is a fundamental change.

If the "5×5" survives the first three phases – the initial meeting, an agreement on technical groups, and the first joint exercise – the initiative will become a durable structure.

If it collapses before then, nothing essential is lost. In both cases, Athens demonstrates that it is prepared to think long-term, not defensively.

This is its real ambition. "5×5" is not an

instrument for short-term gain but an attempt to instil the discipline of cooperation in the region. That discipline may be more important than any bilateral agreement as crises in the Mediterranean and North Africa spread faster than they can be addressed.