

## **Turkey sends second ship to drill near Cyprus, EU warns of action**

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***Energy Minister Fatih Donmez said at the launch of the vessel, Yavuz, it would operate in a borehole near Cyprusâ€™ Karpas Peninsula, and reach a depth of 3,300 metres (3,609 yards). (AP)***

**Brussels:** Turkey launched a second drilling ship on Thursday which will conduct natural gas operations off the northeast coast of Cyprus for three months, a move which risks aggravating a conflict with Cyprus over jurisdiction rights for oil and gas exploration.

Turkey and the internationally-recognised government of Cyprus have overlapping claims in that part of the Mediterranean, an area thought to be rich in natural gas.

Energy Minister Fatih Donmez said at the launch of the vessel, Yavuz, it would operate in a borehole near Cyprusâ€™ Karpas Peninsula, and reach a depth of 3,300 metres (3,609 yards).

Turkey already has a ship offshore Cyprus, and Cyprus last week issued arrest warrants for its crew.

European Union leaders warned Turkey on Thursday to end its gas drilling in disputed waters or face action from the bloc, after Greece and Cyprus pressed other EU states to speak out.

At an EU summit in Brussels, leaders issued a formal statement saying Turkeyâ€™s drilling is â€œillegalâ€ and that the bloc â€œstands ready to respond appropriately.â€

â€œThe European Council underlines the serious immediate negative impact that such illegal actions have across the range of EU-Turkey relations,â€ leaders said, using the official title of their summit. â€œThe European Council calls on Turkey to show restraint.â€

The statement also threatened â€œtargeted measuresâ€: EU code for possible travel bans and asset freezes of Turkish companies and individuals involved in the drilling.

The dispute has escalated in the past month and also risks straining Ankaraâ€™s relations with its western allies.

Ankara, which does not have diplomatic relations with Cyprus, claims that certain areas in Cyprusâ€™s offshore maritime zone, known as an EEZ, fall under the jurisdiction of Turkey or of Turkish Cypriots, who have their own breakaway state in the north of the island recognised only by Turkey.

Cyprus says that defining its EEZ is its sovereign right.

Donmez said unilateral agreements made between Cyprus and the regional countries that attempted to â€œstealâ€ the rights of Turkey and Turkish Cypriots had â€œno legal validityâ€.

â€œTurkey will continue its operations in its own continental shelf and in areas where the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus has licensed Turkiye Petrolleri without stopping,â€ Donmez said, referring to Turkeyâ€™s main oil exploration

company.

“We are warning actors from outside the region that are forming cooperations with Cyprus: Do not chase illusions that will yield no results,” he said. The bloc will now ask its foreign service, the European External Action Service, to put forward options, the statement said.

Cyprus has threatened to jeopardise the EU membership bids of North Macedonia and Albania if the bloc does not take action against Ankara.

One senior EU official said that, aside from sanctions, one option was to end talks with Turkey over extending a customs union, which already allows tariff-free trade with the EU for industrial goods but not services or agriculture.

Another option could be formally suspending Turkey’s status as an official candidate to become a member of the European Union, although talks have been frozen for over a year.

Cyprus was divided in 1974 after a Turkish invasion triggered by a brief Greek-inspired coup. Several peacemaking endeavours have failed and the discovery of offshore resources has increasingly complicated peace negotiations.

- Reuters