

France Seeks EU Sanctions On Turkey Over Energy Tensions

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French Minister for European Affairs said sanctions should be among the options the 27-member bloc considers employing if Turkey continues to endanger the security and sovereignty of a member state.

France's Minister for European Affairs Clement Beaune, left, and Cyprus' Foreign Minister Nikos Christodoulides take part in a news conference at the Foreign Ministry building in the capital Nicosia, Friday, Sept. 18, 2020. Beaune says the European Union should consider imposing sanctions against Turkey if the country continues a hydrocarbons search inside waters where Greece and Cyprus claims exclusive rights. (AP Photo/Petros Karadjias)

Nicosia, Cyprus: France on Friday backed Cyprus' calls for the European Union to consider imposing tougher sanctions on Turkey if the Turkish government won't suspend its search for energy reserves in eastern Mediterranean waters where Cyprus and Greece claim exclusive economic rights.

French Minister for European Affairs Clement Beaune said sanctions should be among the options the 27-member bloc considers employing if Turkey continues to "endanger the security and sovereignty of a member state."

"But we consider that the Union should also be ready to use all the instruments at its disposal, among them the one of sanctions, if the situation didn't not evolve positively," Beaune said after talks with Cypriot Foreign Minister Nikos Christodoulides in Nicosia.

EU leaders are set to hold a summit in a few days to discuss how to respond to Turkey prospecting in areas of the sea that Greece and Cyprus insist are only theirs to explore. Turkey triggered a naval standoff with NATO ally Greece after dispatching a warship-escorted research vessel in a part of the eastern Mediterranean that Greece says is over its continental shelf. Greece deployed its own warship and naval patrols in response.

Greek and Turkish military officers are also holding talks at NATO headquarters to work out ways of ensuring that any standoff at sea doesn't descend into open conflict.

The tensions appeared to ease in the last week, with Greek and Turkish officials having contact after Turkey temporarily pulled back the research vessel. But Ankara extended until mid-October the stay of another drill ship, Yavuz, in an area southeast of Cyprus that lies inside the island nation's exclusive economic zone.

Ship tracking website Marine Traffic showed a second Turkish research vessel, Barbaros, currently operating south of Cyprus.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said Turkey withdrew the surveying vessel, Oruc Reis, from Greece-claimed waters for maintenance to give diplomacy a chance. But he warned that the ship wasn't done working and would be back.

"As soon as the repairs and maintenance process is over, Oruc Reis will again return to its duties," Erdogan said.

The Turkish president also said he's ready to meet with Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis to end the military buildup and standoff at sea, but he warned Greece against actions that could poison the negotiating climate.

"We have no problem on the issue of meeting Mitsotakis. But what will we discuss, under which framework will the

discussion take place, that is important," Erdogan said.

Greek Foreign Minister Nikos Dendias said Turkey's withdrawal of its survey ship and warship escorts was a positive step, but that Greece needs to make sure Ankara is sincere.

He said a list of sanctions will be put before EU leaders at next week's summit and whether they'll be implemented will depend on Turkey's actions.

"I'm hoping that it won't become necessary to reach that point," Dendias said.

Turkey doesn't recognize ethnically divided Cyprus as a state and insists it has every right to search for oil and gas in the eastern Mediterranean. It has vowed to defend its rightful claims to the region's energy reserves, as well as those of breakaway Turkish Cypriots.

Cypriot officials insist the EU shouldn't set a "double standard" by imposing sanctions against Belarus for alleged voter fraud and police brutality while avoiding doing so when Turkey carries on its exploration at the expense of EU members.

Beaune said the EU cannot accept Turkish actions and that France has "committed" to resolving the issue while making its military presence felt in the eastern Mediterranean in support of its EU partners.

- AP