

## Turkey urged to stop 'illegal' drilling activities west of Cyprus

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News

Parliament's biggest political group, the EPP, said it "stands firmly behind" the Republic of Cyprus and called on Ankara to "end these illegal activities."



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Amid rising tensions among Eastern Mediterranean countries, MEPs have called on Turkey to cease its "illegal" drilling activities west of Cyprus.

The demand follows Turkey's recently intensified offshore drilling activities in the Cyprus Exclusive Economic Zone, including the launch of a second drilling operation northeast of Cyprus within Cypriot territorial water.

The EPP put the Turkish drilling activities in EU waters on last week's plenary agenda amid what it calls "increasingly aggressive Turkish behaviour towards the EU and its neighbouring countries."

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German member Michael Gahler, EPP spokesman for foreign affairs, told this website, "We strongly condemn Turkey's illegal activities in the Eastern Mediterranean, particularly the drilling operations west of Cyprus. Turkey must stop this."

Following discussions at the last EU summit, EU foreign affairs ministers have given the green light to travel bans and asset-freezing measures against those responsible for the illegal drilling activities and those providing financial, technical or material support for it.

Gahler added, "The second planned drilling operation west of Cyprus is yet another unacceptable escalation which violates not only Cyprus' but also the EU's sovereignty."

"Therefore, the restrictive measures agreed are necessary. Turkey's continued actions also have a serious negative impact across a whole range of EU-Turkey relations, as well as on the negotiations for a settlement of the Cyprus issue."

"We strongly condemn Turkey's illegal activities in the Eastern Mediterranean, particularly the drilling operations west of Cyprus. Turkey must stop this" **Michael Gahler MEP**

Gahler called on the Turkish authorities "to cease such activities, act in a spirit of good neighbourly relations and respect the sovereignty and sovereign rights of the Republic of Cyprus in accordance with international law."

Meanwhile, Turkey has also been criticised over its alleged treatment of journalists.

The International Press Institute (IPI) recently led a press freedom mission to Turkey, where over 120 journalists are currently jailed and hundreds more face prosecution following the failed military coup of July 2016.

According to the IPI, a "central concern was the systemic failure of the judicial system to provide justice to those caught up in the post-coup backlash and charged with terrorism offences."

The Turkish government has responded to universal criticism of what the IPI calls a "cowed and compromised" judiciary by introducing a judicial reform package that, in the mission's view, fails to sufficiently address the central obstacles to justice and free expression.

Over two days in Brussels this week, the mission members will present their findings to policy makers

in the European Commission and the European Parliament and hold discussions on how the EU can best engage to support the plight of Turkey's journalists.

## About the author

Martin Banks is a senior reporter at The Parliament Magazine

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