

Libyan parliament approves maritime jurisdiction memorandum with Türkiye

Domestic objection in Libya is lifted; Greece and the EU maintain theirs

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With the approval of Libya's House of Representatives, the Türkiye-Libya memorandum on maritime jurisdiction areas has become a document backed by both of Libya's rival political centres; Greece and the European Union (EU) maintain their objections.

The House of Representatives, Libya's eastern-based parliament, met in Benghazi on Tuesday, 20 October 2026, and unanimously approved the memorandum on maritime jurisdiction areas signed between Türkiye and Libya in 2019. According to Anadolu Agency (AA) and Reuters, the House also revoked two decisions it had taken in 2020 at the same session. One of them had rejected approval of the maritime jurisdiction memorandum and the security and military cooperation memorandum signed with Türkiye; the other provided for cutting political relations with Ankara.

The decision removed the strongest objection to the memorandum from within Libya. The Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs welcomed the decision the same day. The Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the EU reiterated that they consider the memorandum invalid.

Background to the decision

What the memorandum covers

The maritime jurisdiction memorandum was signed on 27 November 2019 between Türkiye and the Government of National Accord (GNA), which was then based in Tripoli. The document delimits the two countries' maritime jurisdiction areas in the Mediterranean, that is, the boundary of their continental shelf and exclusive economic zone. These areas determine where a country may claim rights over seabed resources such as oil and natural gas.

The signing took place while the Libyan National Army (LNA), commanded by Khalifa Haftar, was conducting a military offensive against Tripoli. Türkiye was backing the GNA at the time and, on the same day, also signed a security and military cooperation

memorandum with that government. The House of Representatives rejected both memorandums in 2020.

In 2021 the GNA was replaced by the Government of National Unity under Prime Minister Abdul Hamid Dbeibah. After the change of government, the maritime jurisdiction memorandum remained a document endorsed in Libya only by the institutions in Tripoli.

Libya's division and Ankara's contacts with the east

Libya has been divided between two centres since 2014. In the west, the internationally recognised Government of National Unity sits in the capital, Tripoli. In the east, a separate Benghazi-based government and the LNA hold sway, and the House of Representatives acts in concert with them. The elections planned for December 2021 did not take place.

In recent years Ankara has also stepped up its contacts with the eastern administration. During his visit to Libya on 11-12 August 2026, Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan met Prime Minister Dbeibah in Tripoli, and Khalifa Haftar and Aguila Saleh, then Speaker of the House, in Benghazi. In the same month, the Libyan parties set the goal of holding elections within 24 months at the latest, under an agreement reached under the auspices of the United Nations (UN).

About two weeks before the vote, the leadership of the House also changed. On 6 October the House elected Al-Salhin Abdelnabi, a member for Tobruk, as Speaker in place of Aguila Saleh, who had held the post since 2014. Saleh said he did not recognise that session as official. Saleh had been among the leading figures who considered the memorandum invalid, on the grounds that it had been signed without the approval of the House. The new Speaker, Abdelnabi, had chaired the House's Libya-Türkiye Inter-Parliamentary Friendship Committee.

Positions of the parties

The Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that the memorandum safeguards the mutual rights and interests of the two countries on the basis of international law and the principles of equity. The Ministry added that Türkiye would continue to work with its partners for stability in the Mediterranean. The decision was also welcomed in Tripoli. According to the Associated Press (AP), the Foreign Ministry of the Government of National Unity, and according to AA, the High Council of State, an advisory body based in Tripoli, said they welcomed the approval.

The Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that the House's decision does not make the memorandum legally valid. In Athens' view, a maritime boundary can only be drawn between states whose coasts lie opposite or adjacent to each other. Greece argues that the coasts of Türkiye and Libya are not in such a position and that the memorandum disregards the maritime entitlements of Greek islands lying between the two coasts, such as Crete. The Ministry said it had informed its partners and allies and would take the steps it deems appropriate to protect its sovereign rights.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen also stated that the memorandum infringes the sovereign rights of third states and that the EU position set out in 2019 has not changed. Von der Leyen underlined the EU's solidarity with Greece and the Greek Cypriot Administration of Southern Cyprus.

Egypt, for its part, is one of the main supporters of the eastern administration and of Haftar in Libya. Cairo opposed the memorandum in 2019 and signed a partial maritime boundary agreement with Greece in August 2020. On the day of the vote, Egyptian Foreign Minister Badr Abdelatty discussed the Eastern Mediterranean with his Greek counterpart Giorgos Gerapetritis. According to AP, the statement on their conversation made no direct reference to the vote.

What the approval changes

The main objection to the memorandum from within Libya was that it had not been approved by the House. The decision of 20 October removed that objection. Today both the House in the east and the government and the High Council of State in Tripoli support the memorandum. This may also make it harder for a government formed in Libya after elections to withdraw from it.

The substance of the international dispute, however, is unchanged. Türkiye maintains that the memorandum is consistent with international law and the principle of equity. Greece contends that the document runs counter to the law of the sea and disregards the maritime entitlements of islands; the EU likewise holds that the memorandum infringes the sovereign rights of third states. The Libyan House's decision does not settle this legal debate. It is now harder, however, to contest Libya's position by pointing to the country's division.

The decision also creates a new situation for Egypt. The House in the east, which Cairo supports in Libya, has approved a memorandum that Egypt opposed in 2019.

The practical consequences of the decision will become visible in exploration work at sea. In June 2025 Libya's National Oil Corporation (NOC) and the Turkish Petroleum Corporation (TPAO) signed an agreement on geological and geophysical studies in four offshore areas off Libya. Such studies are the first stage of oil and gas exploration.

What to watch

The content of the steps that Greece has said it will take is not yet clear. The scope and timetable of the work between NOC and TPAO will show how the approval translates on the ground. It also remains to be seen what position Egypt will take as it weighs its 2020 agreement with Greece against its partners in eastern Libya.

The election process in Libya will also determine which government implements the memorandum in future. The next international step on the Libya file will be taken at the UN Security Council. Greece is a non-permanent member of the Council for 2025-2026 and holds its rotating presidency in October. The mandate of the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) expires on 31 October 2026, and the Council is expected to hold its vote on the matter at the end of the month.

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