GECMUN XIII

BACKGROUND GUIDE

North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO)

Enhancing maritime security and humanitarian coordination in the Aegean Region

SDG: 10 (Reduced Inequalities)

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Committee Introduction

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was established on April 4, 1949, when the twelve founding countries (Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, United Kingdom, and the United States) signed the North Atlantic Treaty in Washington DC. NATO was initially formed to deter Soviet expansionism of military power and ideological influence in Europe following World War II and the Western leaders were doubtful of the ability of existing international mechanisms including the newly formed UN, thought they were not enough to guarantee their security against the Soviet Union. In response, the Soviet Union formed its own rival alliance, the Warsaw Pact in 1955, consolidating NATO's role as one half of the Cold War's central military standoff, a role it has continued to redefine for itself ever since the Soviet collapse in 1991.

The committee's primary focus is on safeguarding freedom and security of member nations, regarding attack on a member state as attack on all. It protects member nations through political cooperation, collective defense, and integrated air and missile systems. NATO now has 32 member states, having grown through ten rounds of enlargement, most recently with Finland joining in 2023 and Sweden in 2024 in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. While it was founded by North American and Western European nations, it has expanded globally and handles international security matters outside its original borders. NATO is working hard to address a range of security and political issues, and is currently focused on the war in Ukraine and the alliance's deteriorating relationship with Russia, growing cyber warfare threats, and maritime security in the Aegean Region.

After the 9.11 attack on 2001 , for the first time in NATO history, they activated Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty (the collective defense clause).Article 5 states that an attack on their member state is considered an attack on the whole NATO, and commands other member states to provide any support needed. Accordingly, the member states provided Intelligence Sharing, Operation Eagle Assist, Operation Active Endeavour to support the United States.

What sets apart NATO from other UN committees are different operation methods. NATO doesn't just conduct a majority vote. Its decision making is based on consensus vote. Meaning, all member states need to agree to actually carry out in action. Also, NATO is not a UN-affiliated organization, it is a political-military alliance. Thus, it can coordinate military exercises, defense planning, and joint operations among its member states. And the greatest difference of NATO is Article 5, which is a key feature of NATO that distinguishes it from most other committees.

Agenda Introduction

The human rights crisis in the Aegean region has been a long standing challenge to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's security. Its duality of challenges adds complexity to finding a diplomatic solution that alleviates the difficulties. While the Aegean region is a sensitive maritime security zone, it's also a passageway for people crossing from Turkey to Greece, closely related to human rights. Due to the overlap of considerations, instability in the region can rapidly become both a political dispute and a human rights crisis (CHACR, 2). The United Nations is ought to address this agenda; because it involves the safety of civilians at sea, the prevention of interstate tension and the coordination of rescue and assistance for asylum seekers are necessitated.

The issue of human rights and security in the Aegean region became especially brought to attention during the large migration movements into Europe. In the 2010s, the Aegean became one of the main entry points for refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers to seek ways into Europe ((Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 4). UNHCR reported that in 2015, reported sea arrivals from Turkey into Greece was approximately 856,723, with numerous reaching the Aegean islands (ODP, 1). Additionally, the number of individuals who travel through the region dead or missing in Greek territorial waters since that year exceeded 1,600 (RSA, 1). Even after the great number of sea migration cases and high mortality rate of the travel, the crisis persisted. By the end of 2023, 48,721 sea arrivals to Greece were facilitated, which recorded a 159.43% increase from those of 2022 (Greek Council of Refugees, 1).

The magnitude of this issue extends on a regional scale. Greece and Turkey are most directly affected, while consequences also reach the European Union through border control, asylum procedures, and migration routes into the Balkan states. Among those affected, refugees, asylum seekers, migrants, unaccompanied minors, and residents of the island communities remain the most exposed to this matter (Clayton and Holland, 5).

Nevertheless, what makes this issue exceptionally significant is the multilayer of risks it carries. First, weak coordination at sea can lead to avoidable deaths of those who travel through sea. Second, poor treatment of vulnerable groups can act as a grave risk to the human rights of persons. And third, the avoidance of accountability and swift responses may lead to greater diplomatic friction between neighboring states. Lastly, for the United Nations, this issue poses a question of international peacekeeping, humanitarian protection, and effective diplomatic means of cooperation (ODP, 1).

Letter from the Chairs

Head Chair:

Greetings delegates, and welcome to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. I'm Seoyoung Rabia Hong, a junior at Branksome Hall Asia. This is my fifth year of participating in Model United Nations, and my tenth conference serving as a chair/executive member. I'm more than thrilled to serve and guide you as the head chair. I will do my very best to make GECMUN XIII an unforgettable experience for you, not just as delegates but further as diplomats, speakers, and individuals. For the next 2 days, you may face obstacles. However, do not worry excessively. As long as you learn from the challenges, they will be a solid base that nurtures your potential. If you have any inquiries or concerns, do not hesitate to contact me - you are more than welcome to do so :)

Deputy Chair:

This is a warm greeting from Renée Kwon, who will be serving as your Deputy Chair for the conference. I am a sophomore at NLCS Jeju, and I am more than thrilled to mark my fourth year in MUN at this conference. I hope to draw upon this opportunity and my experience to assist you throughout your journey to address the contemporary crises at hand. I am eager to hear your globally minded perspectives on the issues that put international peace and security at risk. I look forward to meeting each and every one of you at the conference. Until then, please do not hesitate to reach out at any point during your research. Above all, the very best of luck, and I'll see you soon.

Associate Chair:

Greetings delegates. I'm SuAha Moon, a junior at SJA Jeju and it is my pleasure to serve as associate chair of NATO in GECMUN XIII. As someone who has experienced both the excitement and challenges of MUN, I know that conferences can feel demanding at times. MUN can be challenging and despite all challenges you might face, I would like to encourage all delegates to try their best. I hope every single one of you takes something from this conference, and have fun throughout the conference. Hope to see you there!

Best Regards,

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Key Terms

Refugee:

A refugee, defined by the 1951 Refugee Convention, is an individual who is outside of and is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin due to a well-founded fear of persecution based on race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group. Under the clauses of the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees, the globalized international refugee laws ensure that refugees are entitled to international humanitarian protection and cannot be returned to places where their lives or freedoms would be threatened. In the Aegean crisis, many individuals crossing from Türkiye to Greece are refugees fleeing armed conflict and/or persecution, and consequently are not protected by their country of nationality.

Asylum Seeker:

An asylum seeker is one who has fled their home country and formally applied for international protection in another state, and is currently waiting for a legal decision on their pending application for a refugee status. The distinction of whether an asylum seeker is ultimately recognised as a refugee is significant in the Aegean region, where newly arrived migrants on Greek islands must undergo asylum procedures before their legal status is established. With an overwhelming influx of asylum seekers in the Greek islands, it is getting progressively harder for immigration authorities to finalise the refugee statuses of asylum seekers, prolonging their indefinite and unstable legal status and ultimately placing them in a precarious position where their rights may not be secured.

Irregular Migrant:

An irregular migrant is one who enters, resides in, or transits through a country without complying with that country's immigration laws, documentation, or entry requirements. In the Aegean region, many crossings occur through illegal routes and channels facilitated by smuggling networks, presenting both humanitarian and maritime security challenges.

Non-refoulement:

Established under Article 33 of the 1951 Refugee Convention, non-refoulement is the fundamental principle of international refugee and human rights law that forbids states from returning, deporting, or extraditing individuals to territories where they may face persecution, torture, or other real threats to their life and/or freedoms. It forms the foundation for refugee protection and applies regardless of whether an individual's migration/refugee status has been lawfully recognised.

Pushbacks:

Pushbacks refer to the practice of preventing or forcibly returning migrants and asylum seekers across an international border without allowing them access to proper asylum procedures or legal assessment. With heightened legal and political controversy surrounding such customs, the discussion centers around whether this may violate international refugee laws—particularly the principle of non-refoulement. Allegations of pushbacks in the Aegean region continue to shape the geopolitical debate on weighing domestic border security with humanitarian obligations.

Eastern Mediterranean Route:

The Eastern Mediterranean Route is one amongst the major migratory corridors into Europe, allowing refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants to enter the European Union by extending from the Middle East and Asia through Türkiye and across the Aegean Sea into the Greek islands. Thanks to the short distances between the Turkish and Greek coasts, Türkiye has now become the primary transit hub for those who take flimsy, unseaworthy boats to nearby Greek Aegean islands like Lesbos, Chios, and Samos.

Territorial Water:

Territorial waters are coastal waters within which the state exercises sovereignty similar to that over its land territory, extending up to 12 nautical miles from a state's baseline via the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). In the Aegean Sea, overlapping maritime claims and the close proximity of the thousands of Greek islands to the Turkish mainland have contributed to intense, longstanding geopolitical disputes between Greece and Türkiye. As a result, both Greece and Türkiye now temporarily maintain a 6 nautical mile territorial water limit in the Aegean region: this still leaves 49% of the Aegean Sea to be classified as international high seas, allowing unrestricted military practices and flight paths for both nations. These territorial water restrictions complicate Search and Rescue (SaR) operations, maritime patrols, and security cooperation by the NATO member states.

Standing NATO Maritime Group 2 (SNMG2) (2016):

Standing NATO Maritime Group 2 (SNMG2) is one of NATO's four permanent multinational maritime task groups, marking the first operation where NATO deployed military naval forces to oversee a humanitarian and migration crisis. Since 2016, SNMG2 has supported efforts in the Aegean Sea by conducting surveillance, reconnaissance, and intelligence-sharing—with burden-sharing amongst member states—to help monitor irregular migrations and hunt human smuggling networks. SNMG2 does not directly intercept or contact refugee vessels, but provides its information to relevant national authorities such as the Greek and Turkish Coast Guard and Frontex, the EU's border and coast guard agency.

EU-Türkiye Statement (2016):

The EU-Türkiye Statement is a March 2016 migration management agreement aimed to reduce irregular migration across the Aegean Sea. Under the arrangement, any and all migrants arriving irregularly on the Greek islands are to be returned to Türkiye following legal procedures, while the EU committed to a "1-for-1" resettlement scheme. This meant that for every irregular migrant extradited to Türkiye from Greece, another refugee in Türkiye is resettled directly into the EU. The EU committed to a financial assistance summing up to 6 billion euros for refugee resettlement in this process. Although it significantly reduced cases crossings, the recent escalation of the refugee crisis raises the question of whether this defies the purpose of non-refoulement, as well as the political implications behind the resettlement scheme.

Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA):

Defined by the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) and cited in NATO's maritime doctrine, Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) is the agreed-upon understanding that any and all matters pertaining to the maritime environment would impact the security, economy, and environment. The MDA has enabled cooperation and burden-sharing amongst NATO member states to monitor migration routes and stem smuggling operations. Overall, NATO has achieved remarkable success in surveillance and intelligence-sharing, coordinating timely and efficient responses accordingly to both maritime security and humanitarian interests.

Historical Background

Start of the Syrian Civil War (15 March 2011):

The Syrian Civil War was the escalation of tension between protests against President Bashar al-Assad's government and the state's violent responses towards the people, breaking into a multi-sided war involving the government, various internal factions, and external actors. The conflict led to the displacement of more than half the pre-war population, in which nearly 7 million were absorbed into Türkiye, Lebanon, and Jordan. As the war dragged on with no prospect of resolution, many were stuck in temporary shelters with unstable livelihoods: limited legal and administrative processes and inaccessible public services labelled them as asylum seekers indefinitely. Most Syrians took short crossings from Greek islands—Lesvos, Chios, and Samos—to Türkiye, the largest host for migration at the time. Türkiye was then perceived as a transit hub that allowed permits into EU territory within reach of small, flimsy boat travel. In the process, the East Mediterranean route was also entertained by Afghans, Iraqis, and others, quickly constructing a consistent influx of irregular arrivals.

Peak of the Aegean Migration Crisis (2015):

In 2015, the Eastern Mediterranean route was entertained by an unprecedented population: nearly 856,000 asylum seekers arrived in the eastern Aegean Greek islands by sea in inflatables. Travelling in such precarious conditions led to the estimated deaths of 800 in the Aegean region over the course of the year. Not only were the vessels overcrowded, but also the immigration reception centres were overwhelmed and subsequently exhausted. The issue soon became one recognised as a European concern, with irregular arrivals continuing northwards to Hungary, Germany, and Sweden, wherein the continent was experiencing the widespread, distributed repercussions of the migration crisis. The EU failed to coordinate a functional response, with Germany adopting inconsistent applications of the Dublin Regulation to Syrians and Hungary constructing a barrier along its southern borders. The agenda had also been made politically unavoidable with a photograph of Alan Kurdi—a toddler of a Syrian family seeking refuge—provoking a strong online response, as well as becoming a symbol for the refugee crisis.

EU-Türkiye Joint Action Plan (29 November 2015):

On 29 November, 2015, a Joint Action Plan was activated at a summit between EU leaders and Türkiye held in Brussels. The plan stands as a benchmark as the first coordinated attempt to address the Eastern Mediterranean route refugee crisis with the principal departure hub. The agreement stated that Türkiye undertook action to expand coast guard patrolling and interception capacity and respond against human smuggling networks operating in its western coastline. Moreover, the Turkish government was to improve living conditions for Syrians within temporary shelters, providing them sufficient access to job opportunities and education—with the intent of preventing further movement onwards into EU territory. In return, the EU committed 3 billion euros to support Türkiye's refugee reception centres and revitalised discussions on visa liberalisation. However, the plan was also subject to criticism as it contained no mechanism for the safe return of persons who had reached the Greek islands, and was lacking legal and operational frameworks.

NATO Involvement in Maritime Defence (11 February 2016):

On 11 February, 2016, in response to the continued crossings despite the Joint Action Plan, the North Atlantic Council (NAC) finalised a decision to deploy the SNMG2 to the Aegean Sea at the request of Germany, Greece, and Türkiye. It was notable in a sense that the task was one unusual for NATO, and that it required Greece and Türkiye to cooperate over a stretch of sea without national boundaries. Correspondingly, the mandate was negotiated as narrowly as possible, under which the Group conducted monitoring and surveillance of irregular movements and potential smuggling operations, but not direct interception of vessels. The Group was responsible for transmitting the knowledge to the national coast guards of Greece, Türkiye, and Frontex, where the choice of conducting returns or assuming search and rescue was left to the national authorities of both states and Frontex. While the activity was established as a temporary measure against the agenda, it has not yet been terminated and is perceived as the only operational role NATO has taken upon in relation to the refugee crisis.

EU-Türkiye Statement (18 March 2016):

After days of negotiation, on 18 March, 2016, the European Council summit reached the Statement that came into effect on the twentieth of March. It was a response to the failure of the Joint Action Plan to reduce crossings over the winter, along with the prior closure of the Western Balkan route, which stranded asylum seekers in Greece with no onward pathway. The Statement's primary mechanism was returns, wherein any and all migrants arriving irregularly on the Greek islands are to be returned to Türkiye following legal procedures, while the EU committed to a "1-for-1" resettlement scheme. This meant that for every irregular migrant extradited to Türkiye from Greece, another refugee in Türkiye is resettled directly into the EU. The EU committed to financial assistance amounting to 6 billion euros for refugee resettlement in this process. Although it significantly reduced case crossings—nearly a 97% drop within the year, the renewed escalation of the refugee crisis questions the legality of whether this defies the purpose of non-refoulement, as well as the political implications behind the resettlement scheme.

Türkiye's Border Opening (28 February 2020):

Turkish officials have announced that Türkiye will no longer prevent asylum seekers from crossing into EU territory, and the border was effectively opened. This was triggered by the political and financial burden Türkiye was facing from the Syrian Civil War, where the Turkish military suffered serious casualties and domestic displacement emergencies in Türkiye's southern front. Effectively, the announcement was a leverage that showcased that the dependency established in the Joint Action Plan could be exercised both ways. In response to this, the Greek government reinforced its borders with armed units and suspended migration applicants for a month—which again stands for controversy and contested legality with the renewal of the agenda. This event was politically significant, highlighting how the Statement did not resolve the underlying issue; rather leaving the European border policy in the hands of a single nation.

Route Shift for Crete (2023~2026):

As naval patrolling in the Aegean Sea intensified, human smuggling networks have shifted to utilise a longer and more dangerous route from eastern Libya to a 200-mile-long journey at open sea to Crete. Crossings rose over the years, amounting up to 25,000 attempts in 2025, where the shift is visible through arrival statistics between islands: despite Lesvos having been the main entry point because of its closeness to Turkiye, by April of 2026, roughly only 800 irregular arrivals have been recorded. On the other hand, Crete has received over 2,200 arrivals consisting of a varying demographic of populations from Bangladesh, Sudan, South Sudan, and minorities. The persistence in smuggling

operations despite efforts from the EU and NATO demonstrates the pressure that has moved beyond the outreach of the 2016 mandate, as it does not cover waters beyond the Aegean region.

Greek-Libyan Bilateral Cooperation (July 2025~):

As the previous frameworks cannot cover the new route, Greek authorities held dealings directly with Libyan authorities. By June 2026, the agreement had developed into joint operations and trainings of Libyan coast guard units for search and rescue tactics, while also intercepting suspected trafficking vessels reaching Crete and Gavdos. However, the rival governments of Libya imply political costs when dealing with the eastern authorities, and further place Greece and Türkiye on opposing sides of the Libyan situation.

Current State of Affairs

The challenge of enhancing maritime security and humanitarian coordination in the Aegean sea persists until 2026. However, the number of irregular sea arrivals in the sea has decreased in comparison to the past 12 months. It is estimated to be due to different factors including weather circumstances and etcetera. Nevertheless, there have been continuous cases of irregular migration. For instance, an irregular migration was recorded on February 18th, which involved a large search and rescue operation. In the south of Crete, a wooden boat carrying dozens of migrants, attempting to board a commercial vessel, was capsized. During the operation, 20 individuals were rescued and 3 deceased bodies were discovered, while 25 are still missing. On the other hand, another vessel carrying 67 migrants from countries including Bangladesh and Sudan has been safely captured (PRIAVO, 3). While humanitarian response to sea arrival migration remains, sustaining maritime security coexists. Greece and Türkiye, each nation located in the west-northern and eastern of the Aegean sea, continue to have contested views on their maritime sovereignty, creating significant geopolitical tension. Greece has stood by the expansion of their territorial waters to 12 nautical miles. On the other hand, Türkiye states that this would pose grave threats to delicate sea stability. The 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea defines that territorial sea extends to 12 nautical miles from the country's baseline. Nevertheless, Türkiye is not a signatory of this treaty. The reason behind the abstention stems from the Aegean sea's complex geographical structure. Therefore, applying such strict standards to the region would result in extreme limits to international flights and sea travels.

In addition, Greece has militarized several islands in the Aegean sea. Türkiye claims that it's a violation of the Lausanne and Paris treaties, which requires the demilitarization of certain Greek islands that are currently militarized (Fatsa, 1). Moreover, the 1947 Paris Peace Treaty, in article 14, paragraph 2, states that the Dodecanese Islands, which are a group of 15 islands and 150 smaller islands, shall be maintained demilitarized. Because of this, Türkiye claims that Greece's militarization of islands in the Aegean is a direct breach of international law and poses great threats to maritime security. Moreover, Türkiye maintains that the islands are held by Greece's legal authority under the condition that they remain unmilitarized (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2). On the other hand, Greece affirms that the militarization of the islands are acts of national security. Athenes claims its the right of national security under the article 51 of the UN charter. Moreover, Greece points out that Türkiye doesn't have the authority or right to enforce the demilitarization under the 1947 Paris Peace Treaty since Türkiye is not one of the signatories. Furthermore, it pointed at Türkiye's Fourth Army, also known as the Army of the Aegean, equipped with sizable landing feet stationed as an existential threat across the waters. The overlapping historically present conflicts remain as the biggest challenge for effective humanitarian responses and maintenance of maritime security.

To alleviate the crisis' impact on European nations, NATO has been contributing to helping with refugee and migrant crises in the Aegean sea since 2016. NATO has collaborated with the Greek coastguards, the Turkish coastguards, and Frontex (also known as the European Border and Coast Guard Agency) to conduct rescue missions, and monitor migrants crossing the sea. Moreover, NATO assists with blocking illegal ship trafficking too. Under international law, any vessel has to rescue people at risk (stranded, injured, distressed). As stated beforehand, Frontex is an agency under the European Union. NATO has established connections with the EU and its counterparts linked with Frontex for operations and tactics. The collaboration contributes to refugee crisis responses (NATO, 3). Nevertheless, the significance of NATO's contribution is highly debated. Since its activity is

somewhat limited to surveillance and lacks law enforcement, its enhancement of maritime responses may not be as effective.

On the other hand, some factors pose threats to the maritime security of the Aegean sea. One instance is the Russo-Ukraine war. A Ukrainian sea drone was discovered in Lefkada, one of the Greek islands in the Ionian sea. While the Ionian and the Aegean are distant, the discovery poses instability to Greek maritime security and international connections. It has been estimated that a Ukrainian sea drone launched to damage Russian forces or Russia-related vessels, before drifting into Greek territory. While “Athenes remains committed to supporting Kyiv, it must also safeguard its ports and territorial waters” according to the Middle East Forum. From this, it can be inferred that Greece is seeking for a balance between ensuring security in their waters while being diplomatic (Kouroushi, 3).

Stances of Parties

Albania

Albania supports stronger cooperation with the EU and neighboring countries on border and migration management. For instance, Albania had cooperated with Frontex on migration, border security, and cross-border crimes. Its cooperation had focused on controlling migration flows, combating migrant smuggling and trafficking, and strengthening external border security. Because of its geographic proximity to Greece, Albania has a direct interest in stability and security around the wider Aegean region. Albania would likely support stronger information-sharing and cooperation between neighboring countries and European institutions. At the same time, it may emphasize that humanitarian assistance should remain part of maritime and border management efforts.

Belgium

Although Belgium is quite distant from the Aegean region, as an EU and NATO member, Belgium does participate in its security role. Belgium has participated in the Aegean cooperation, during the refugee crisis, NATO worked with countries like Greece, Turkiye, and Frontex (EU Border and Coast Guard Agency) on maritime surveillance, information sharing, etc. Belgium may favor cooperation through existing agencies/companies rather than independent national action and creating completely separate systems, given its previous participation in European cooperation on migration and maritime security.

Bulgaria

Bulgaria has been working with Greece and Turkiye on migration and border security issues. In April 2026, Bulgarian, Greek, and Turkish officials met to discuss strengthening cooperation against migrant smuggling and migration flows. Because of Bulgaria's geographical location, sharing a direct southern border with Greece, Bulgaria centers more on regional surveillance and information sharing while maintaining strong external border controls. It has actively participated in European border-management efforts and relies on cooperation with Frontex and neighbouring states to address migration pressures.

Canada

Canada supports stronger maritime security in the Aegean Region, but also acknowledges the importance of protecting people whose lives are at risk at sea. Despite being non-EU member, Canada has participated in maritime security operations in the Mediterranean. Therefore, Canada would support increased information sharing and cooperation between NATO, Greece, Turkiye, Frontex, and national coast guards to detect irregular crossings and combat human smuggling networks. Canada would favour separating the fight against criminal smuggling networks from the humanitarian obligation to rescue people in danger.

Croatia

Croatia views maritime security and irregular migration as important parts of protecting the EU's external borders. As an EU and Schengen member, Croatia supports stronger border monitoring, cooperation with neighbouring countries, and Frontex involvement. Croatia would therefore support increased surveillance and intelligence sharing in the Aegean to identify smugglers and prevent dangerous irregular crossings. However, Croatia also recognizes that people who need international protection should be given access to asylum procedures. Croatia therefore supports stronger EU

cooperation, especially assistance for countries such as Greece that face greater migration pressure, while maintaining effective border controls.

Czechia (Czech Republic)

Czechia places a strong focus on controlling irregular migration and protecting the EU's external borders. It supports legal and managed migration while believing that irregular crossings should be reduced. In the Aegean, Czechia supports closer cooperation between Greece, Turkiye, Frontex, and other European countries to monitor maritime routes and combat human smuggling. Concurrently, Czechia supports search and rescue operations when vessels are in danger. However, it believes that proper screening and asylum procedures should follow rescue rather than treating every rescued refugee as eligible for permanent protection.

Denmark

Denmark has one of the stricter migration policies in Europe and places a strong emphasis on border control. Therefore, Denmark supports increased maritime surveillance and intelligence sharing in the Aegean to prevent irregular crossings and disrupt human smuggling networks. Denmark also acknowledges cooperation with Greece, Turkiye, and Frontex to prevent dangerous journeys before they occur. At the same time, Denmark recognizes the obligation to rescue individuals in distress at sea borders. It also supports search and rescue operations while emphasizing proper screening, asylum procedures, and deportation.

Estonia

Estonia approaches migration from the perspective of national security, border protection, and the preservation of national sovereignty. Although Estonia is not located near Aegean region, it supports stronger European cooperation in monitoring maritime routes and combating human trafficking and smuggling. Estonia also supports greater intelligence sharing and Frontex involvement. However, Estonia recognizes the importance of conducting search and rescue operations for individuals in danger around the border regions. It also distinguishes the humanitarian responsibility to rescue refugees regardless of their needs for asylum or relocation to another European country.

Finland

Finland considers irregular migration as a matter of border management and national security. This position has become important due to Finland's concerns about the use of migration as a means of political pressure. In the Aegean region, Finland would therefore emphasize stronger coordination between European authorities, including Frontex, to monitor migration routes and identify organized smuggling activities. Finland also recognizes the importance of humanitarian assistance when vessels (or any other transportation refugees are using) are unable to safely continue their journey. However, humanitarian assistance should be followed by appropriate identification, asylum procedures, and return procedures if necessary.

France

France views the Aegean migration issue as requiring both regional cooperation and a clear humanitarian framework. As a Mediterranean country, France is directly affected by irregular maritime migration and the activities of human smuggling networks. France therefore advocates closer coordination among Greece, Turkiye, Frontex, and other relevant authorities, especially in exchanging information and addressing organized criminal networks. France also maintains that individuals rescued from the maritime crossings must have access to appropriate humanitarian

assistance and asylum procedures. France seeks to combine effective control of irregular migration with the protection of fundamental rights.

Germany
Germany has been a strong advocate for adhering to international maritime law, border security, and coordinated response to conflicts in the Aegean region. Germany has worked with NATO, Türkiye, national coast guards, and Frontex (EU Border and Coast Guard Agency that manages external borders and combat crime). In 2016, Germany, Greece, and Türkiye have collaboratively requested for NATO's support for the refugee and migrant crisis caused by the ongoing Syrian war and human smuggling. As a result, NATO has deployed its standing NATO Maritime Group 2 to respond to the security and humanitarian crisis. Moreover, the German naval forces also participated in the NATO mission where they conducted reconnaissance, monitoring, and surveillance across Greek, Turkish, and international waters. Germany's goal of surveillance extends to preventing illegal crossings and alarming the coast guards for the relocation of overcrowded or endangered boats.

Greece
As a country that directly meets the Aegean sea, Greece reinforces maritime border security in the Aegean because its place on undocumented migration, human smuggling/trafficking, territorial sovereignty, and maritime security is at a high-stake. However, Greece is also involved with search-and-rescue operations of irregular migrant ships crossing the ocean and protecting vulnerable people at sea. While Greece wants to prevent unauthorized migration as much as possible, it also has the expectation of international law to ensure safety over people whose boats are unsafe and provide asylum. As mentioned beforehand in great depth, Greece has been deploying Hellenic Coast Guard vessels, aircraft, drones, and advanced technologies to monitor the Aegean sea and identify distressed boats. Moreover, it is given support by Frontex where it supplies surveillance aircraft, drones, vessels, personnel, and technical equipment. When Frontex provides information to Greece, its Joint Search Rescue Coordination Center manages responses.

Hungary
Hungary is one of the most restrictive nations that value national sovereignty and security over other matters regarding migration in the European Union. Hungary's government is often opposed to mass immigration, irregular entries, mandatory relocation of asylum seekers, and more. While Hungary doesn't directly meet the Aegean Sea, they believe that human smuggling, trafficking, and possible crimes in regards to irregular migration must be regulated through collective security. Therefore, Hungary stands for heightened surveillance and intelligence-sharing among nations to detect boats and disrupt smuggling networks in general. On the one hand, Hungary is in support of search-and-rescue operations for people whose vessels are not secure. On the other hand, they don't believe in automatic displacement or acceptance of migrants to Hungary: the former prime minister Viktor Orbán even stated that "Hungary will not be an immigrant country" (Losonczi, 1). Hungary is in strong favour of maritime security and combating organized crimes. Nevertheless, it maintains its firm rejection for migrants' asylum distribution or refugee quotas in Europe.

Italy
Italy is a member of NATO that is physically bordering the Mediterranean Sea. Therefore, Italy regards maritime security undocumented migration, human trafficking, human smuggling, and territorial control as major national and international security concerns. Italy's main goals regarding the balance of maritime security and humanitarian coordination are to control the irregular sea arrivals and disintegrate illicit human-smuggling networks while considering the threats they could bring to national security, public order, and et cetera. While it has conducted search-and-rescue operations in the past, it has also received backlash from rescue organizations for intentional actions focusing on stopping undocumented migration. In 2023, more than 2,500 people were reported dead or missing in one migration route (SOS Méditerranée, 2). Notably, the Italian parliament "converted Decree-Law 01/2023 into Law 15/2023", placing stricter rules and response to NGOs' (Non-Governmental Organizations) vessels that are conducting SAR (Search and Rescue) missions in the central

Mediterranean (Emergency, 1). According to the law, the NGO rescue ships are required to directly head to the port following the rescue, having to ignore other refugees possibly in-need. This law restricts NGOs from actively navigating and committing humanitarian acts. The conversion of law partially reflects Italy's current stance on the subject of migration in the mediterranean and the security factors that come with it.

Latvia

Latvia doesn't have a nation-specific policy or mission associated with the Aegean region's migration. However, its views are often aligned with the general foreign and defense policy perspectives of the European Union and NATO across maritime security, freedom of navigation, and humanitarian border management. Latvia stands by strict adherence to collective frameworks of the EU and NATO, focused on combating human trafficking and irregular migration. Moreover, Latvia tends to prioritize regional Baltic defense over Mediterranean engagements. However, a controversy around Latvia's engagement in the Aegean Sea was brought to attention. On January 25th, 2024, a video was released where masked men in a small boat approached another small boat with approximately 30 migrants on board. The masked men were seen threatening the migrants with sticks and in the background, a Latvian coast guard ship deployed by Frontex was spotted (InfoMigrants, 2). While Latvia's stance remains aligned with that of the EU and NATO, its involvement in humanitarian support remains a controversy.

Lithuania

Lithuania's view is also similar to that of the EU and NATO. It generally prioritizes border security before humanitarian concerns. Following the 2021 migration crisis by Belarus, Frontex was deployed in the Lithuania-Belarus border to control the migrant influx and strengthen the EU's external border according to Frontex Executive Director Fabrice Leggeri (Frontex, 2). While Lithuania doesn't border the Aegean Sea, it supports NATO's operations on controlling smuggling, trafficking, and irregular migration. Because of its connection to Frontex, it supports sharing intelligence, border monitoring, and cooperation with NATO and the neighbouring countries to hinder human smuggling. Similar to Hungary, it is generally not openly welcoming large numbers of migrants and has used emergency border rules to control the irregular entry of migrants. However, some critics mention that Lithuania's strict border controls have hindered the migrants from seeking asylum (Human Rights Monitoring Institute, 3). Therefore, Lithuania is considered as conservative and focused on the security dimension of migration, especially for irregular migration.

Montenegro

Montenegro maintains a generally firm stance with border control and security in regards to the migration in the Aegean Sea. While Montenegro is located in the Western Balkans, which doesn't meet with the Aegean Sea, it has displayed an uncompromising standing point in regards to Europe's immigration issue. Early into 2026, Montenegro was alleged to have migrant centers established by the European Union. As a response, the prime minister of Montenegro Milojko Spajić delivered that the establishment will not take place in Montenegro. He has said "...Montenegro has not engaged in negotiations on establishing such centers on its territory, nor has the Government received an official initiative for their opening – and when the initiative is on the table, our response will be negative". Through his comment, he has made clear that Montenegro is generally not interested in having migrant centers built in Montenegro, while its relationship with the European Union will continue to protect the 'shared borders' and to manage 'migratory movements' (European Western Balkans, 2). On the other hand, Montenegro's reforms on migration are expected to be aligned with the EU pact on migration and asylum, as the pact moved into full force by June of 2026. On the other hand, Montenegro is expected to match the "national legislation's, institutional structures', and operational practices'" standards to those of the EU pact including EU's fundamental rights safeguards and migration processes (IOM, 3).

Netherlands

While the Netherlands doesn't border the Aegean Sea, it maintains a strict deterrence-focused stance on the irregular migration of the Aegean Sea. In 2016, Netherlands proposed a refugee-swap deal where the migrants in Greece are exchanged for 250,000 refugees in Turkey. The expected outcome of the proposal was that "250,000 refugees in Turkey to be relocated across participating member states" (DW, 2). The NATO allies were in favour of the Netherlands' proposal and it was soon moved into operation. The NATO ships worked with the Turkish and Greek coast guards and the Frontex border control guards to rescue the migrants in stress at sea and take them back to Turkey. The Netherlands showed interest in sending maritime resources to assist NATO's effort (NL Times, 2). However, NGOs' response to the Dutch state's proposal was pessimistic. NGOs sued the Dutch state over the EU-Turkey refugee deal due to the Dutch state's continued involvement while human rights of the migrants were at great risk. Therefore, the Netherlands stands by the security-focused, conservative stance for the migrant crisis in the Aegean region, providing direct proposals to mitigate the issue in ways that may put the migrants' and refugees' rights at risk (Amnesty International EU, 3).

North Macedonia

North Macedonia maintains a strictly conservative, security-focused stance on the migrant crisis in the Aegean Sea. Located in the Balkan region, it acts as a barrier that stops northward movement of migrants from Greece. During the 2015 migrant crisis, North Macedonia declared a state of emergency and momentarily closed the southern border meeting with Greece. Because the route through Bulgaria became more restricted and Greece's cease of strict control over the influx of migrants and asylum seekers to make the leaving process faster, the pressure of migrant volume increased on North Macedonia. North Macedonia estimated that 42,000 migrants crossed its territory in the span of 2 months in 2015 (Szpala, 3). While it changed its policy from highly restrictive rules of migrants trespassing to a looser 72-hour temporary protection policy, it fears of being a buffer nation. With Hungary constructing a wall around their border and passing laws to deport refugees back to non-EU states, North Macedonia is concerned of carrying the burden of infrastructure failure and security risks by themselves. Although they received approximately €90,800 financial aid from the EU, it's considered as ineffective, and North Macedonia still stands on the stance of prioritizing national security and wellbeing rather than ensuring migrant humanitarian support (BBC, 5).

Norway

Norway is considered to support humanitarian aid for the migrants moving through the Aegean Sea both directly and indirectly. In May of 2026, the Norwegian court "dismissed the extradition of an activist accused of facilitating the illegal entry of people into Greece". The Norwegian court mentioned that the actions of the arrested Norwegian activist who founded the Aegean Boat Report, an NGO that monitors and rescues migrants on boats in distress in the Aegean Sea, were lawful and protected under "a fundamental article of the European convention on human rights". While the activist was accused of illegally smuggling the migrants to Greece, Norway stood by the humanitarian assistance of migrants over focus on security regarding the matter (Smith, 4). On the other hand, "Norway signed an agreement in Greece on a new funding period for the EEA and the Norway Grants". Through their collaboration, Norway allocated approximately 159.3 euros to Greece for reaching shared goals including the management of migration. Therefore, it demonstrates Norway's nuanced perspective of human rights-focused and cooperative approaches (Government of Norway, 3).

Poland

Poland sustains a strict and restrictive stance on the irregular migration through the Aegean Sea. They perceive the crisis through a broader view of border externalization, national sovereignty, and the tug with the EU for the 'burden-sharing'. Poland's parliament passed an amendment that allows border guards to 'pushback' the migrants who cross the border illegally. Pushback is a practice where migrants are forced to leave the country without assessing their asylum requests. According to the

European Convention on Human Rights, the migrants have the legal rights to have “access to the asylum process, even if they have crossed a border illegally”. Poland’s initiative put migrants in significant threats where they are passed away between multiple countries and being mistreated in facilities like hospitals (BBC, 5). However, Poland continues to maintain a rigid stance with the Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk saying “Poland will not take in migrants under the Migration Pact. Nor will we pay for it. The decision has been made. We don’t talk, we act”. Poland' s critical response for the crisis demonstrates their focus on national affairs and uncompromising manner towards the EU’s goal to share the pressure of the migrant influx (Politico, 2).

Portugal

While Portugal does not experience direct threat to its own borders thanks to its position of geographical remove, it has contributed to a collective defense with real assets such as frigates to serve in NATO’s maritime groups as well as patrol/rescue ships and personnel. Overall, Portugal has shown consistent commitment very large for a country of its size; this is also reflected in its reception records, where it has been taking in and documenting more people than its assigned share under the EU’s 2015 relocation scheme. The Portuguese government may continue to argue shared responsibility and ethical standing for resettlement and non-refoulement is the only real solution to resolve the refugee crisis.

Romania

Most of Romania’s concrete contribution and support for the organisation’s Aegean deployment has been through Frontex, in which Romanian coast guards and border officials have been active under Operation Poseidon in Greek waters. Romania also opposes compulsory intake of asylum seekers—having voted against the EU’s 2015 emergency relocation scheme—and argues that solidarity should only be achieved through reinforced defence at the border rather than mandatory relocation of all irregular arrivals. Thus, the Romanian government views the Aegean crisis more as a political instrument rather than a humanitarian emergency, likely to support the strengthening of surveillance and knowledge-sharing mechanisms.

Slovakia

As Slovakia does not have much proximity to the Aegean Sea, neither navy, nor coast guards in the region, it has been vocal on the legal aspects of the matter: not only did it vote against the 2015 relocation plan, it sued the EU at the European Court of Justice arguing that the scheme was unjust and illegal. Though the court denied that claim, Slovakia still stands by its stance and has taken in a minimal number of asylum seekers under the plan. Rather, Slovakia believes that effective solidarity can be achieved by reinforcing the guard of the EU territory's outer border by border personnel—shown from its deployment of officers to Frontex missions—and resources.

Slovenia

Slovenia is located on the Balkan route, making it one of the nations that migrants pass through when moving northward from Greece. While Slovenia has no navy and a compact maritime policing unit, it has set up razor wire along its border in response to the huge influx of undocumented asylum seekers crossing Slovenian territory. In addition, it has deployed its officers to Frontex missions in Greece. While the fencing has been removed as of 2025, Slovenia still prioritises stability and security at the EU's external borders.

Spain

Spain has significant naval power in the Mediterranean, using its capacity to treat people found at sea as a rescue obligation before a border problem. Drawing expertise from its own migration-at-sea experience, Spain is vocal about prioritising the humanitarian aspect of the agenda; accordingly, it supports the 2015 relocation scheme in sharing the burden that Mediterranean nations were previously

condemned to. By handling arrivals collectively, Spain supports the idea that the issue can be resolved by investing into cooperative measures with departure and transit hubs. Therefore, the Spanish government within the committee will likely drive the discussion for search and rescue duties and burden-sharing before a security response.

Sweden

Though Sweden was not a member of NATO throughout the evolution of the agenda, it is one that is substantially affected by the refugee crisis; in 2015 alone, Sweden accepted around 163,000 asylum applications. While this was the highest per person in the EU, it had a strain on administrative procedures and social services leading to a policy reversal. Ever since, Sweden has been limiting residence permits to the legal minimum, and was in favour of the 2015 plan hoping for its share to be relieved. Therefore, the Swedish government will seek pragmatic solutions for border security and burden-sharing.

The Netherlands

The Netherlands stands as a significant actor in both militia and diplomacy. It has a capable navy that regularly contributes ships to NATO's maritime groups, and has consistently taken part in the Aegean deployment. The Dutch government has been the one to hold the EU Council presidency when the EU-Türkiye Statement was discussed and signed. While the Netherlands also took part in the 2015 relocation scheme, immigration has become a dominant domestic political issue; as a result, the government created by 2023 committed to the strictest asylum policy they ever had. Overall, the Netherlands would defend NATO's involvement in the Aegean and argue strongly for legal and orderly return systems.

Türkiye

As the largest destination country of the Mediterranean route, it houses roughly 4 million Syrian refugees alone. While Türkiye has co-created the NATO Aegean mission, it has insisted that ships only monitor and report when Greek vessels operate on Turkish waters and vice versa. The ongoing sovereignty disputes between the two allies has led the Turkish government to use the immigration agenda as a leverage—most representatively in 2020 when it opened its borders—and demand more burden-sharing and money to guard its borders.

United Kingdom

The UK's Royal Navy has contributed directly to the Aegean deployment in 2016, sending vessels and assets to aid surveillance and intelligence-sharing to both nations' coast guards and Frontex. While the British government is active on humanitarian support and rescue operations abroad, it has strict policies on arrivals and documentation of asylum seekers. While the UK has no role in Frontex nor EU since Brexit, NATO is one of the few institutions that the UK can shape Mediterranean migration policies—itself being a strong incentive to stay involved. The British government is still likely to resist any legally binding relocation of resettlement obligations, judging from its refusal to join the 2015 plan. Rather, it would be willing to aid resettlement directly in camps near Syria.

United States

As the dominant military and financing power for Alliance, the United States have enabled many operational capabilities for Aegean missions. However, having no effect on the distant route, the American stakes for the agenda are strictly politically strategic. The US's interests are keeping NATO cohesive by de-escalating Greek-Türkiye rivalry and thwarting human smuggling networks that have connections to terrorist and organised crime. Due to political tensions, the US will also avoid discussions on the Aegean sovereignty disputes. While its resettlement plans are inconsistent, its support regarding operation is unparalleled; it will be willing to support more surveillance and intelligence-sharing as long as it does not drag NATO into a confrontation between Greece and Türkiye.

Possible Solutions

1. **Joint Maritime Surveillance**

countries could join forces to build a shared maritime information system. All participating countries that are willing to join may access this system, and share three types of information within the system: the movements of suspicious vessels, unexpected maritime emergencies, and potential maritime security threats. In addition to building this whole system, there is another task that countries can develop: they can also enhance cooperation among their coast guards. Delegates could consider how this system would be managed. For instance: First, to conduct joint patrols together. Second, to maintain regular contact with one another to ensure uninterrupted communication.

2. **Stronger Humanitarian Coordination**

Governments of all countries may consider carrying out closer collaboration with NGOs and international organizations when encountering unexpected maritime emergencies. The unexpected maritime emergencies refers to hazardous situations that occur suddenly near the Aegean region and require immediate response. Those situations demand smoother coordination with various specialized non-governmental organizations and international institutions, which can help stabilize the connection of all links in rescue operations. Countries may also attempt to explore the feasibility of a set of regional emergency response plans, which can be put to use in the event that a large number of people require medical care, temporary shelter, food, or other core assistance.

Possible cooperation between governments, NGOs, and maritime authorities could be discussed, including how emergency plans could address medical care, shelter, transportation, and resources. Delegates can also consider which organizations should be involved, what roles they could have, and how responsibilities and resources could be shared while balancing humanitarian needs with national security.

Questions to Consider

1. How could NATO balance surveillance and intelligence sharing, and their larger role in search and rescue?
2. How could NATO assist Greece and Türkiye while ensuring the protection of other countries' national sovereignty?
3. How could NATO guarantee that the rescued migrants' human rights are protected during the transportation and asylum request process?
4. How could NATO ensure that strong maritime surveillance doesn't push migrants to pursue more dangerous routes to reach Europe?
5. Why should NATO encourage the member states to contribute vessels, funding, and intelligence for rescue and security purposes? If that's the case, how should NATO implement this?

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