

Cruel Sea

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The Middle East is the most militarized area on earth. It is the first in military spending internationally, in GDP percentages. It absorbs almost 30 per cent of global arms exports. It has been tested by foreign interventions, by wars, bloodbaths, occupations and human rights violations. First among the latter is the right of the Palestinian people to their own state within 1967 borders. The continuing war in Syria has destroyed the country. It has created millions of refugees; thousands continue to die in the Mediterranean, and those who come helpless to Europe discover the two faces of European policy that talks of humanity and, at the same time, builds new walls.

The risk of nuclear weapons proliferation in the Middle East is greater than anywhere else. The illegal Israeli nuclear arsenal already exists, but other states in the region may also succumb to the temptation to obtain nuclear arms in the future. Erdogan's administration proves unpredictable, while Turkey facilitates and stores NATO's nuclear arsenal, and could follow the examples of India and Pakistan by building two nuclear plants in this high-risk region. Israel has never become a member of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). On the other hand, North Korea is not the only example of leaders' stupidity. Declarations by Donald Trump and Theresa May ring the bell that, unfortunately, we cannot trust anybody, as long as there is one nuclear bomb on earth.

On the other hand, it must be noted that this issue is used as a pretext for new interventions and war threats. We remember the big lie about Saddam's

possession of nuclear weapons, which Bush and Blair used as an excuse to invade Iraq in 2003 and, later, to suppress Iran.

There is no excuse for the acquisition of nuclear arms by any country. These weapons do not constitute defensive means, and there is no defense against them. Nuclear weapons are currently the only weapons of mass destruction which are not subject to a banning treaty. So far, 127 countries have signed the humanitarian pledge supporting a ban on nuclear weapons. While NATO's strategic concept of 2010 says that, as long as nuclear weapons exist, NATO will remain a nuclear alliance, the concept also declares that the alliance should work to create conditions for a world free of nuclear weapons. A ban on nuclear weapons will stigmatize and prohibit nuclear weapons, creating better conditions for nuclear disarmament. Working for nuclear disarmament is not just a reference in a strategic concept, this is also an obligation in the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, which has been signed by all member states of NATO. It is clear, therefore, there is no conflict in a NATO nation such as Greece supporting a ban on nuclear weapons; rather, it is our obligation.

The mushrooming of nuclear plants is another source of worry. The terrorist attacks in Europe, especially in Belgium, proved that nuclear plants are targets, and Europe is full of old and dangerous nuclear facilities. The questions about their security have not been answered, especially in this troubled region, while nuclear waste could well turn the Mediterranean into a dead sea and the neighboring countries into toxic dumping areas.

The inextricable link between 'peaceful' and warlike uses of nuclear technologies, and the threat to future generations inherent in the creation and use of long-lived radioactive material, must be recognized. We must move towards reliance on clean, safe, renewable forms of energy production that do not poison the environment for thousands of centuries. The true 'inalienable' right is not to nuclear energy, but to life, liberty and security of person in a world free of nuclear weapons.

We recognize that a nuclear free world must be achieved carefully and in a step-by-step manner. We are convinced of its technological feasibility. Lack of political will, especially on the part of the nuclear weapons states, is the only true barrier. In the same way as chemical, depleted uranium (DU) and biological weapons are prohibited, so must nuclear weapons be banned. We call upon all States – particularly the nuclear weapons states, declared and *de facto* – to say YES to the Humanitarian Pledge in order to achieve nuclear weapons abolition. We also urge the European Union to support it because Chernobyl proved that there are no frontiers to the nuclear threat.

Learning from the new scientific data of the dangers coming from recent earthquakes in Turkey, Italy, and Greece, and from the continuing tragedy of Fukushima in Japan, we call louder than ever for all existing nuclear power plants and facilities (Chernobyl, Korzlodui) to be closed down, and for new projects (Akkuyu, Hinkley, etc) to be cancelled immediately, in the Eastern Mediterranean and everywhere else in the world.

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Proposed Peace Programme *for the* **Middle East and Mediterranean**

The dramatic worsening of the Syrian crisis, despite the efforts to achieve a truce, emphasizes the crisis in the international system, and its inability to achieve peaceful and democratic solutions to international problems. It likewise emphasizes the failure of the European Union's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), with the result that initiatives to stop the war in Syria have ended up in the exclusive hands of the United States and Russia.

At the same time the refugee-migrant problem has once again proved that the issue of peace in the Middle East is of vital significance not only for the countries and peoples of the region, but for Europe and the entire world.

In November 2015, the Observatory of International Organisations and Globalization (PADOP) submitted to the Greek government and the European Union a comprehensive programme to promote peace in the Middle East and the Mediterranean respectively, which we have asked them to adopt. Our proposal includes the following six points:

1: The international efforts to end the war in Syria must be stepped up, with the participation in the peace process of all sides in the Syrian civil war. What is sought for Syria is a representative transitional government that will work for national consultation, in order to ensure the country's territorial integrity and secure for the Syrian people the opportunity to elect a post-war democratic government through multi-party elections. The

country's reconstruction and democratic organisation will neutralize the jihadists and fundamentalists of all kinds. It will also permit the millions of refugees to be repatriated, particularly those who have sought safety in neighbouring countries.

2: The key problem for peace in the Middle East remains that of Palestine. Finding a just and viable solution, through termination of Israeli occupation and the establishment of an independent Palestinian state, has become a critical priority. The Parliament of the Hellenes has already passed a unanimous resolution, proposed by the government, to recognise the Palestinian state, as was also proposed in 2013 by the Secretary General of the United Nations. The next step that Greece must take is for the government to recognise the state of Palestine, by planning the required processes.

3: The Middle East is perhaps the most militarized region on Earth, absorbing some 30% of legal global armaments exports as well as a large part of the illegal arms trade. Therefore, the international community must impose strict controls on armaments exports to the region, accompanied by an embargo on exports to warring countries or parties.

4: It is also necessary to highlight Cyprus as a central problem of peace and security in the Mediterranean. Europe should be aware that solving this problem on the basis of United Nations resolutions could transform Cyprus into a prime example of the co-existence of different ethnic and religious communities, and thus the united island would become a bridge of peace between Europe and the Middle East.

5: The key country in the region as regards the stability of the Middle East and relations with the EU is undoubtedly Turkey. This is why the peace process between Ankara and the Kurds must be revitalised for the good of a democratic and peace-loving Turkey, a stable factor for peace and security throughout the Middle East and the Mediterranean.

6: A basic cause of the conflicts in the Middle East is the fact that this region is characterized by the lack of democracy and of sustainable human development, even though it is very rich in reserves of oil, natural gas and other sources of energy. A major step in the peace process would be to face and resolve the social and other inequities in this region.

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