



TURKEY AND EUROPE

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EU CONDITIONALITY: A SUSTAINABLE FRAMEWORK FOR GOOD NEIGHBORLY RELATIONS BETWEEN TURKEY AND GREECE?

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For the past three years, tension and animosity have returned to being routine in everyday relations between Turkey and Greece. The agenda has been packed with more issues of disagreement and has rendered what traditionally has been the core of Turkish-Greek contention, e.g., the delimitation of the Aegean continental shelf, to an almost nostalgic past.

In general, to all those familiar with the Eastern Mediterranean state of affairs, the Greek-Turkish dispute has been a significant source of instability and a major concern for Greece's and Turkey's NATO allies and European partners. Over the last five decades, the potential for a major clash between the two countries has been salient to the regional security equation, albeit overshadowed by Cold War dynamics. In the summer of 1974, following the Greek junta's coup against Archbishop Makarios and the Turkish invasion or intervention - depending on one's vantage point - in two phases triggered by the coup, the two NATO allies

crossed the threshold of a 'hot confrontation', and a generalized war was averted, in large part, thanks to US/NATO intercession.[1] Since that time, Greece and Turkey have engaged in a costly and protracted arms race in their matching attempts to establish a favorable balance of power. In 1976, 1983, 1987, 1996, and 1998-9, crises erupted in the Aegean and/or on Cyprus that brought the two countries to the brink of war.[2]

Turkey's assertiveness regarding the maritime jurisdiction areas in the Aegean and the Eastern Mediterranean manifested itself in the form of naval muscle-flexing in 2020, and was comparably countered by Greece. Hence, prospects for an armed confrontation, either by choice or by accident, topped the agenda for the first time since December 1999.[3] The 2020 escalation signaled that the soothing effect of EU candidacy on Turkish foreign policy had nearly worn out.

There is no doubt that the Turks and

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[1] The literature is vast. For a limited selection of works that provide a comprehensive and rather balanced account of both history and issues see Mustafa Aydin and Kostas Ifantis (eds.), *Turkish-Greek Relations: The Security Dilemma in the Aegean*, London, Routledge, 2004; Gilles Bertrand, *Le conflit helléno-turc*, Paris, Maisonneuve & Larose/IFEA, 2003; Deniz Bolukbasi, *Turkey and Greece: The Aegean Disputes*, London, Routledge-Cavendish, 2004; Dimitris Keridis and Dimitris Triantafyllou (eds.), *Greek-Turkish Relations in the Era of Globalization*, Dulles, VA, Brassey's, 2001.

[2] See Kostas Ifantis, "Historical Context, National Narrative and Prospects of Reconciliation in the Aegean: The View from Athens", in Judy Carter, George Irani and Vamik D. Volkan (eds.), *Regional and Ethnic Conflicts: Perspectives from the Front Lines*, New Jersey, Prentice Hall, 2009, pp.183-184.

[3] Burak Bekdil, Kastellorizo: *Tiny Island, Colossal Dispute*, BESA Center Perspectives Paper No. 1479 (11 March 2020).

Greeks antagonize each other over geopolitics, and this is serious enough. But what is puzzling for neutral observers is the extent to which feelings of mistrust and (mis)perception of each other's intentions have persisted in institutional contexts that should have led to the emergence of shared norms, understandings, and a sense of collective identity, paving the way for the peaceful resolution of the two nations' disputes.[4] This is even more puzzling when someone thinks not only of their geographic proximity but also of their "living" and working together in various Western and European institutions. It is so paradoxical when you compare it with other traditional competitive dyads, and so hard to comprehend the inability of a security and defence community to stabilize expectations and provide conditions that could and should have led to the mitigation of the Greek-Turkish conflict. [5]

There were, also, short periods of denouement such as the well-publicized 'Spirit of Davos' between Andreas Papandreou and Turgut Özal (early in 1988), and the contacts in a climate of relaxation and mutual understanding between Turgut Özal and his Greek counterpart, Constantine Mitsotakis, in the early 1990s. The respite provided by attempts at reduction of tension in the 1988-1992 period did not evolve toward lasting reconciliation, given the acute criticism in both countries, exercised by opposition forces, against what they perceived - each from their own perspective - as asymmetrical accommodation. Following the logic of a zero-sum game, both governments (with the full backing of their publics) have been

engaging in cycles of tension and détente following a similar pattern to Soviet-American relations in the 1947-1989 period.[6]

In the post-Cold War era, the Aegean has remained a very dangerous flashpoint. This concern has been consistent in both Europe and the US. It has been and still is a situation that has the disturbing potential of escalating to a more serious crisis, with alarming destabilizing effects at a regional level. In one of the most recent crises, in January 1996, the two countries nearly went to war over the twin islets of Imia/Kardak. Only a last-minute high-level US intervention prevented a military clash between the two nations. Moreover, in the wake of the incident, the air forces of both sides continued to engage in mock dogfights, increasing the risk that an accident or unplanned incident could cause the situation to spiral out of control and lead to armed conflict. The so-called Imia-Kardak episode has been one more case confirming the existence of an intense security dilemma. Less than four years later, in late 1999, following two more crises over the S-300 antiballistic missiles, and the capture of Abdullah Öcalan, bilateral relations began to warm up. In the spring of 1999, the two countries opened a dialogue on non-sensitive issues such as trade, the environment, and tourism. This process was given greater impetus by unfortunate events: The catastrophic earthquake in Turkey in August 1999 and the one in Athens in September of the same year triggered an outburst of widespread mutual sympathy in both countries. This was followed by Greece's support for Turkey's EU candidacy at the Helsinki

[4] Bahar Rumelili, "Liminality and Perpetuation of Conflicts: Turkish-Greek Relations in the Context of Community-Building by the EU", *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 9, No. 2, June 2003, p. 214.

[5] See Ronald Krebs, "Perverse Institutionalism: NATO and the Greco-Turkish Conflict", *International Organization*, Vol. 53, No. 2, 1999, pp. 343-377. Also, Fotis Moustakis, *The Greek-Turkish Relationship and NATO*, London, Frank Cass, 2003.

[6] Ibid.

summit in December 1999 and a visit to Ankara by the Greek Minister of Foreign Affairs in January 2000.[7]

Back in 1999, the PASOK government in Greece correctly diagnosed that Athens could hardly come up on its own with any means or incentives that would prompt Ankara to reconsider or change its rhetoric and stance on contested issues. Moreover, Turkey's growing alienation from the EU weakened Greece's hand in bilateral dealings. Therefore, harnessing Turkey's urgently needed political and economic transformation to the EU structures and processes (and hence to EU conditionality) was expected to help build and sustain confidence between the two countries. This expectation proved to be realistic, and EU membership prospects constrained Turkey from taking coercive actions against Greece. In fact, this constraint remained in effect even after Berlin and Paris deliberately derailed Turkey's EU accession negotiations. Ankara's reluctance to declare its EEZ in the Eastern Mediterranean is a case in point. The hardliners in Ankara have been pushing for such a declaration for a long time.[8] The Foreign Ministry remains anxious to avoid irreparable damage to Turkey's EU prospects. Eventually, a midway solution was found when Ankara signed a memorandum of understanding with Libya on the delimitation of maritime jurisdiction areas in the Mediterranean in November 2019.[9] Thereafter, the chain of events not only revived the tensions between Athens and Ankara but also transformed the character of the problem from a bilateral to a multilateral issue, involving two prominent EU members, France and Germany as well.

This paper discusses how the EU provided

a framework within which Greece and Turkey have managed their competition for two decades after Turkey was declared an EU candidate. Successive sections attempt to demonstrate how the competitive and often conflictual nature of the bilateral relationship is sustained as a result of the persistence of traumatic historical memories, national identities constructed and fed by narratives (and perceptions) of threat, "maximalist" and "revisionist" policies and preferences in a regional context, and the way they are reinforced and legitimized by the ever-present specter of a crisis. Indeed, the most recent episode of tension between the two countries lends credence to the view that the EU could play a crucial role in helping Greece and Turkey transcend their traumatic historical memories for a better future. In the final section, the paper will explore how the qualifications for a viable rapprochement are outlined in the absence of the proverbial EU anchor.

On history, identity, and culture

In 2021, Greeks celebrated the bicentenary of their modern statehood. In 2023, Turks will commemorate a century of the Turkish Republic. In 2022, both will remember that they bitterly fought each other a hundred years ago in a war that decisively shaped the course of their future. In view of both Turkey and Greece's painful and difficult process of subscribing to the powerful conditions of modernity during the 19th and 20th centuries, it is probably inevitable that their respective national identities should have espoused a "defensive" form, more commonly associated with societies striving to consolidate their national

[7] Ibid.

[8] See Cem Gürdeniz, *Doğu Akdeniz: Mavi Vatan'ın Güney Cephesi*, İstanbul: Pankuş Yayınları, 2020, pp. 162-4.

[9] Daren Butler and Tuvam Gümrükçü, "Turkey signs maritime boundaries deal with Libya amid exploration row, Reuters, 28 November 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-turkey-libya-idUSKBN1Y213I> (visited 11 March 2022).

dignity. Identifying the “other” in such a context becomes almost inevitable.[10] It can be argued that in both cases, the dominant quest for security has formed an organic part of the modern national cultural discourse. An attempt to pin down the historical particularities of their respective national discourses, taken in themselves, is beyond the scope of the discussion in this paper. For those interested, there is an abundance of literature dealing with almost all aspects of identity formation and development and the instrumental role the perception of the not-to-be-trusted “other” has played. [11]

In Europe, the United States, and elsewhere, most people understand that Greeks and Turks have been fighting off and on for several centuries – from well before the fall of Constantinople in 1453 through the Greek War of Independence in the 1820s to the Turkish War of Independence in 1919-1922. And then there was Cyprus in 1974, not to mention the numerous instances when they almost came to blows since then. As one prominent retired Greek diplomat has commented:

“The relationship between Greeks and Turks is influenced by the fact that the

two peoples have for many centuries lived together and apart, in peace and war, in trust and suspicion. Some elements bring them together; others drive them apart. Geography, history, culture, psychology, religion, business and economic activity, education, social and many other factors provide the elements of the equation.”[12]

From a constructivist standpoint, what Ergul has termed as “prejudice” against the Greeks in the framework of the Republic of Turkey was a cultural feature carried over from the Ottoman era[13]:

“The Greeks were otherized as a part of the plural Ottoman system. The strong role of the Istanbul Rum Orthodox Patriarchate, Phanariote families, and the Greek merchants of the imperial times was rejected in the modern nation-state identity of Turkey. The privileged position of the Greek financial and trade sector that were fostered with capitulations and western support was contradictory for the sovereignty of the new state.”[14]

Moreover, in the context of the political, social, and economic development process of the Turkish Republic in the 1920s and 1930s, and beyond, modernization (and

[10] See Spyros A. Sofos and Umut Özkırımlı, *Tormented by History: Nationalism in Greece and Turkey*, Columbia, Hurts/Columbia University Press, 2008.

[11] An excellent account of the Greek national identity discourse can be found in Constantine Tsoukalas, “Greek National Identity in an Integrated Europe and a Changing World Order”, in Harry J. Psomiades and Stavros B. Thomadakis (eds.), *Greece, the New Europe, and the Changing International Order*, New York, Pella, 1993. On the “underdog culture” in Greece see Nikiforos Diamandouros, “Cultural dualism and political change in postauthoritarian Greece”, *Estudios - Working Papers / Instituto Juan March de Estudios e Investigaciones, Centro de Estudios Avanzados En Ciencias Sociales*, 50. On Turkey see Ayse Kadioglu, “The Paradox of Turkish Nationalism and the Construction of Official Identity”, *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 32, No. 2, 1996; Frank Tachau, “The Search for National Identity among the Turks”, *Die Welt Des Islams*, Vol. 8, No. 3, 1963, pp. 165-76; Ioannis Grigoriadis, *Trials of Europeanization: Turkish Political Culture and the European Union*, Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2009, especially chapter 6. For a focus on the role of the Greek “other”, see Feride Asli Ergul, *The Formations of Turkish National Identity: The Role of the Greek “Other”*, unpublished PhD Thesis, Middle East Technical University, Ankara, September 2009. For a most recent analysis of the roots and early formation of Turkish national identity see Aysel Morin, *Crafting Turkish National Identity, 1919-1927, A Rhetorical Approach*, London, Routledge, 2022.

[12] Alexander Philon, “Greek-Turkish Relations since 1974” in *United States Foreign Policy Regarding Greece, Turkey & Cyprus: The Rule of Law and American Interests*, American Hellenic Institute Conference Proceedings, April 29-30, 1988, Washington, DC, p. 1

[13] Ergul, 2009, pp. 297-8.

[14] Ibid. Ergul claims that “the Greek minority in Turkey was seen as the “agents” of the Greek state and although they were defined as the equal citizens of the Turkish Republic, they could not escape from being the subjects of economical and social otherization in Turkey.”

westernization and/or Europeanization for that matter) was defined as getting closer to the West and adopting the dominant norms and values of western cultural hegemony. Hence, Turkish nationalism was resolutely modeled on Western (i.e., European) nationalist discourses and intellectual production.[15] At the same time,

“the idea that the Greeks were the “fake Europeans” was seeded in the minds of the Turks. (...) This suggestion has a twofold otherization in itself. On the one hand, the Greeks were undervalued because of their pretending as they were Europeans. It was a refusal of the projection that finds the roots of the Europeans within the ancient Greek civilization. (...) On the other hand, the Greeks are (...) assessed as untrustworthy as a nation who is always acting according to the interests of the Europeans. (...) The support of the great states to the Greek independence, the Treaty of Sévres and the Greek invasion of the Western Anatolia after the victory of the Allies in the First World War were all evaluated as the indications of the Greeks being the agents or the tools of the European interests.”[16]

This experience and the way it is interpreted and reinterpreted has resulted in a narrative that accepts that the Greeks have never really transcended their irredentist impulses and that - given a chance - they will pursue policies seeking to harm Turkish interests in the Aegean, in Cyprus, and more recently in the Eastern Mediterranean. In historical terms, the Balkan Wars were instrumental in shaping

identities and perceptions. For many in Turkey, a coalition that included Greece, Bulgaria, Serbia, and Montenegro is held responsible for the downfall of the Ottoman Empire. The war resulted in the territorial shrinking of the Empire, where 83% of the European territories and 69% of the European population were irreversibly lost.[17] In 1919, the Greek campaign in Western Anatolia marked the apogee of the Greek otherization in Turkish national identity discourse.[18] In Turkish historiography, the Turkish War of Independence started the moment the Greek forces landed in Izmir.[19]

In Greece, the representation of Turkey as the national enemy was quite an easy and persuasive task since Greece’s War of Independence was fought against the Turks - in fact, against the Ottomans. Still, the distinction was easily overlooked by the Greeks, who came under the influence of nationalism to develop a modern Greek national identity almost a century before the Turks did the same. Making Turkey into the “historical enemy” played a decisive role in strengthening and solidifying Greek national identity. Through such discursive exhortations, the “historical enemy” and the absolute, even existential, struggle against it appeared as a critical complement to the foundation of the nation’s identity in the Hellenic classical heritage. Throughout the history of the modern Greek state, the image of Turkey as the “historical enemy” has transformed cultural and identity discourse into actual policy options and security preferences.[20] Moreover, and at a different but interrelated level of “cognition”, many Greeks believe that the

[15] Ibid., p. 298.

[16] Ibid., p. 298-9.

[17] Fuat Dündar, *Modern Türkiye'nin Şifresi: İttihat ve Terakki'nin Etnisite Mühendisliği (1913-1918)*, İstanbul, İletişim Yayınları, 2008. Cited in Ergul, p. 193.

[18] Ergul, 2009, p. 211.

[19] Ibid., p. 216.

[20] Ifantis, 2009, p. 185.

four centuries of Ottoman rule was the reason for missing out on the Renaissance, Enlightenment, and western modernity in general, resulting in weak political, economic, and social development.

At the same time, Greece's very existence as an independent state arose out of the war against the Ottoman Turks, while its state and national integration was a protracted process lasting over a century and ending with the shattering of the "*Megali Idea*" irredentist vision in 1922 and the subsequent 1923 Treaty of Lausanne. [21] What has been termed the "Asia Minor Catastrophe" was a landmark in the subsequent development of Greek-Turkish relations and the Greek (as well as the Turkish) perception of the "other" in the Aegean.[22] Close to 1.5 million Greeks descended upon a country of less than 5 million, while about half a million Turks went in the opposite direction.[23]

In the decades that followed, and despite efforts in the 1930s and the early 1950s to establish a functional relationship between them, the perception of a "threat from the East" has dominated, to the present day, Greek strategic thinking, defense planning, and the overall Greek security culture.[24] The image of Turkey pursuing a calculated revisionist policy in the Aegean, Thrace (and Cyprus) reflects a grand strategic consensus in Greek domestic and foreign policy. This consensus has come about for many reasons. Turkey's "revisionist" stance in the Aegean (especially since the 1970s) has

been highlighted by partitionist demands with respect to the Aegean continental shelf and, more recently, maximalist exclusive economic zone claims in the Eastern Mediterranean. With or without the thorns of ethnic contention, these two issues present great difficulties since they involve control over (potentially) important resources in a unique setting with unclear legal precedents.

According to the Greek narrative, Turkish "revisionist actions" underlie a determination to change the status quo by challenging existing Greek sovereignty and sovereign rights. Greeks' perception of threat reflects not fear of all-out war but rather a well concerted Turkish strategy of threatening to move aggressively against a number of possible territorial targets, thus creating a series of military *faits accomplis*. [25]

On the other side of the coin, the Turkish perception suggests that Greece is a "revisionist" neighbor poised to take advantage of any sign of military, diplomatic or economic weakness that Turkey may display. There is a school of thought that argues that the Greek claims in the Aegean and the Eastern Mediterranean are but manifestations of Greece's relentless pursuit of the *Megali Idea* – the idea of reviving the Byzantine Empire. For subscribers to this view, Greece's ultimate aim is to suffocate Turkey by restricting and denying it access to the surrounding maritime domains. Similarly, they argue that any

[21] On this see, Paschalis Kitromilidis, "Imagined Communities and the Origins of the National Question in the Balkans", in Martin Blinkhorn and Thanos Veremis (eds.), *Modern Greece: Nationalism and Nationality*, London, Sage-Eliamep, 1990.

[22] Ifantis, 2009, p. 186.

[23] See Renee Hirschon (ed.), *Crossing the Aegean: An Appraisal of the Consequences of the 1923 Compulsory Population Exchange between Greece and Turkey*, Oxford, Berghahn Books, 2003

[24] The so-called Atatürk-Venizelos period in the 1930s remains to this day the golden age in the relations between Greece and Turkey. The two not only normalized their relations but Greece also facilitated Turkey's admission into the rudimentary international and European institutions of the interwar era. A case in point is Athens' instance on Turkey's inclusion in Aristide Briand's proposed European Union and Coudenhove-Kalergi's *PanEuropa*. Dilek Barlas and Serhat Güvenç, "Turkey and the Idea of a European Union during the inter-war years: 1923-1939," *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 35, No. 3, 2009, pp. 432-7.

[25] See Constantine Arvanitopoulos, "Greek Defence Policy and the Doctrine of Extended Deterrence", in Andreas Theophanous and Van Coufoudakis (eds.), *Security and Cooperation in the Eastern Mediterranean*, Nicosia, Intercollege Press, 1997, p. 154.

hint of conciliation by Turkey will be construed as a sign of weakness and be most likely to put Turkey on the slippery slope of territorial losses to Greece. The term “Sevres Syndrome” captures the essence of the underlying Turkish fear of disintegration.[26]

The European vocation of Turkey, the “Helsinki” Strategy and beyond

In December 1999, Turkey was granted candidacy status by the European Union at the Helsinki Summit. Although a number of factors accounted for this change of attitude on the part of the EU toward Turkish ambitions for membership, none was as crucial as the dramatic departure of Greece from its previously entrenched position of blocking Turkey’s membership in the EU.[27] In the past, Athens temporarily allowed progress to be made in EU-Turkey relations, such as the launching of the EU-Turkey customs union in 1995. However, in such instances, Greece was able to extract concessions from other EU members. In 1995, the price of the customs union was Ankara’s acquiescence in the EU’s decision to approve the Republic of Cyprus’ candidacy. However, Ankara later denied any linkage between the two issues and continued to argue that the London-Zurich Accords precluded the island’s admission to an international organization where Greece and Turkey were already members.

Whatever the original deal or understanding on the trade-off between

the EU-Turkey customs union and the Cypriot candidacy was, it did not survive the next major flare-up over the boundaries in the Aegean. In December 1995-January 1996, Turkey and Greece came to the brink of war due to their overlapping sovereignty claims over two islets, *Kardak* in Turkish and *Imia* in Greek. It was a last-minute intervention from the US, not the EU, that stopped the two long-time members of the Transatlantic Alliance from waging a full-scale war.[28] The crisis was followed by a return to the Greek practice of vetoing Turkey-EU relations. The customs union was already underway, but Greece blocked the EU funds allocated to Turkey to help absorb the initial shockwave of liberalizing trade under the customs union.

It should be noted that the 1995-96 crisis shook some of the old certainties about the Greek strategy toward Turkey. Indeed, by making the prospect of a hot conflict very real, the crisis produced powerful demands for an urgent rethinking. The “Helsinki Strategy” was a drastic reversal of old habits. Athens calculated that it would be much better off with a next-door neighbor meeting all the Copenhagen (1993) and Helsinki (1999) criteria for EU membership.[29]

Before the *Kardak/Imia* crisis, the boundary disputes between Greece and Turkey centered around the delimitation of maritime jurisdiction areas in the Aegean. While Athens did not recognize issues other than that over the continental shelf as part of the agenda of bilateral disputes, Ankara argued that the agenda of Greek-Turkish disputes has been far more prolific, including the breadth of the

[26] See Cem Gürdeniz, *Anavatandan Mavi Vatan’a*, İstanbul, Kırmızı Kedi, 2021, p. 251.

[27] On Greece’s Helsinki strategy see Panayotis Tsakonas, *The Incomplete Breakthrough in Greek-Turkish Relations: Grasping Greece’s Socialization Strategy*, London, Palgrave, 2010.

[28] For a third party account a few months after the crisis, see *Greece and Turkey: The Rocky Islets Crisis*, CRS Report for Congress, 96-140F, https://www.everycrsreport.com/files/19960307_96-140_3214ae5fec00873b05749c5167ff590c59d97bcf.pdf (Accessed 9 December 2021).

[29] Kostas Ifantis, “Perception and Rapprochement: Debating a Greek Strategy Towards Turkey”, in Aydin and Ifantis, 2004.

territorial seas, the breadth of Greek airspace, and the FIR responsibility and demilitarized status of the Greek islands in the Aegean. After 1996, a new item was added to this agenda for Ankara, the so-called gray areas. The gray areas argument suggests that the legal ownership of some islands, islets, and other geographic formations in the Aegean Sea, which are not explicitly mentioned in one of the international agreements that attest ownership of such formations, remains uncertain and unsettled. Hence, their status had to be established through bilateral negotiations.

It should be noted that as for the resolution of Greek-Turkish maritime boundary issues, the two countries adhere to two different, if not mutually exclusive, methods of dispute settlement. As a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea II (UNCLOS II), Greece prefers the settlement of maritime jurisdiction disputes at the International Court of Justice, while Turkey, as a non-signatory, has expressed a clear preference for bilateral negotiations, though in recent years this also includes international arbitration as a means of solution, if bilateral relations fail.

The EU, and its predecessor, the EC, had avoided taking an official stand on the boundary disputes involving one of its members and a membership aspirant before the Imia/Kardak crisis. At the Luxembourg Summit in December 1997, the EU dashed Turkey's hopes for fast-track candidate status, while twelve applicants, including Central and Eastern European countries as well as Malta and Cyprus, were accepted. What added insult to injur was that the EU created an ad

hoc platform to reportedly appease Ankara over its humiliating exclusion from the big-bang enlargement. The EU devised the European Conference to bring together its members, the candidate states, and Turkey. The Luxembourg European Council Presidency Conclusions defined the criteria for participation in this ad hoc platform. It was stated that,

“The members of the Conference must share a common commitment to peace, security and good neighborliness, respect for other countries' sovereignty, the principles upon which the European Union is founded, the integrity and inviolability of external borders and the principles of international law and a commitment to the settlement of territorial disputes by peaceful means, in particular through the jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice in the Hague. Countries which endorse these principles and respect the right of any European country fulfilling the required criteria to accede to the European Union and sharing the Union's commitment to building a Europe free of the divisions and difficulties of the past will be invited to take part in the Conference.

The States which accept these criteria and subscribe to the above principles will be invited to take part in the Conference. Initially, the EU offer will be addressed to Cyprus, the applicant states of Central and Eastern Europe and Turkey.”[30]

In practical terms, the EU hoped to persuade Ankara to accept the jurisdiction of the ICJ to settle the boundary issues with Greece and give up its objections to

[30] https://www.europarl.europa.eu/summits/lux1_en.htm (Accessed on 30 December 2020).

Cypriot membership of the EU in return for a seat in what later turned out to be an expensive talking shop. The Luxembourg Summit was the first time the EU took a clear pro-Greek stand, in Turkish perception, in the resolution of boundary issues between the two countries. Understandably, it did not go down well with Ankara, which flat out rejected the invitation to the European Conference.

The Helsinki Summit that came two years later marked a sea change in Turkish-EU and Turkish-Greek relations. In December 1999, although Turkey was declared a candidate state, there were still strings attached to the offer. However, this time, the EU presented a more balanced and somewhat accommodating approach regarding the boundary issues involving Greece and Turkey. At Copenhagen, the EU modified the wording on its preferred method of dealing with those issues:

“In this respect, the European Council stresses the principle of peaceful settlement of disputes in accordance with the United Nations Charter and urges candidate States to make every effort to resolve any outstanding border disputes and other related issues. Failing this, they should within a reasonable time bring the dispute to the International Court of Justice. The European Council will review the situation relating to any outstanding disputes, in particular concerning the repercussions on the accession process and in order to promote their settlement through the International Court of Justice, at the latest by the end of 2004.”[31]

Thus, the EU gave Turkey five years to settle its boundary issues with Greece through peaceful means, including

bilateral negotiations. The Helsinki Summit introduced a much-needed framework for addressing those boundary issues. However, the framework could be effective as long as Turkey remained on the EU membership track. In other words, the boundary issues would no longer escalate to their previous dangerous levels thanks to the safety net provided by the EU connection of the protagonists. Almost two years later, the two countries launched institutionalized negotiations to explore prospects for resolving the boundary issues in the Aegean in March 2002. By February 2004, Turkish and Greek diplomats had gathered in 23 rounds of the so-called exploratory talks.

While the EU-set deadline was missed, the two countries continued to hold exploratory talks. As exploratory talks, they differed from previous Turkish-Greek diplomatic engagements in two respects. First, the 2004 deadline had passed, and Turkey’s EU negotiations had run out of steam. However, these talks were marked by continuity until very recently. Also, they were attended by more or less the same diplomats from both sides. In August 2019, Turkish’s chief negotiator Ambassador Çağatay Erciyes, in his opening remarks to the International Law of the Sea Summer School at Kadir Has University, İstanbul, remarked that there had been more than 60 rounds of exploratory talks since March 2002. Another distinct aspect of these negotiations has been the remarkable absence of leakages to the media on both sides. The Turkish and Greek diplomats have remained extremely tight-lipped about the substance and progress of the exploratory talks.

Even in the absence of the EU safety net after 2008, Athens and Ankara remained

[31] https://www.europarl.europa.eu/summits/hell1_en.htm (Accessed 30 December 2020).

somewhat true to the spirit of rapprochement that followed the earthquakes in Turkey and Greece in 1999. The resilience of the rapprochement in the absence of the EU anchor for Turkey can be explained by the preferences of the domestic political actors. In Turkey, the advent of the Justice and Democracy Party (JDP) into power in 2002 initially implied a rejection of “securitization” in foreign policy. Ahmet Davutoğlu, as Chief Advisor to the Prime Minister first and then as the Minister of Foreign Affairs, championed the idea of “zero-problems-with-neighbors” that added a new lease of life to the rapprochement. Moreover, Athens was later consumed by the fallout from the global financial meltdown and had no interest in or incentive to end the rapprochement with Ankara. The primacy of domestic economic problems became even more pronounced under the Syriza rule in Greece between 2015 and 2019. It should be noted that while hardliners on both sides of the Aegean stuck to their positions, however, their influence on foreign policy-making was somewhat constrained.

Currently, it seems that those who advocate more assertive and confrontational policies have been able to partially recover their influence. Moreover, the boundary issues between the two countries have spread to the Eastern Mediterranean. Consequently, the Greek-Turkish challenge to EU security now involves more complex, more complicated multi-dimensional aspects and is inseparably linked to issues of security and stability in the region in the aftermath of the Arab Spring.

A number of factors account for this change in the character and scope of the

relations. Ankara shifted the center of gravity in its foreign policy away from the West to the East or the Middle East in particular. Erdoğan’s and his JDP’s ulterior motives in embracing Turkey’s bid notwithstanding, Ankara saw a greater potential for a key role in the Middle East alone than as an EU candidate. This was the result of changing regional dynamics. This shift also required Turkey to preserve their *modus vivendi* with Greece, despite the weakening and eventual loss of EU conditionality. The geographical shift went hand in hand with a shift in the unit of analysis in Turkish foreign policy, particularly under Ahmet Davutoğlu, from the state or “nation-state” level to a level transcending Turkey’s borders in pursuit of a neo-Ottomanist agenda. For such a foreign policy vision, problems with Greece were seen as consequences of Turkey’s strict adherence to the Westphalian norms. Such norms lost their relevance to the conceptualization and implementation of Turkish foreign policy. Once a pre -or post- national paradigm was adopted, Israel replaced Greece as Turkey’s public enemy number one. This new rivalry was relevant to a broader audience than Greece in the Muslim world. Greece was relevant only to the Turkish nation and its nationalistic element. Such shifts seemed to pay off, particularly in the early years of the Arab Spring. However, the turn of events at home and in the region pushed Turkey back on a national interest-driven track in foreign policy. The Syrian Civil War revived Turkey’s worst fears of encirclement by a “Kurdish belt” in the South.

Moreover, the coup attempt on 15 July 2016 prompted Erdoğan to reshuffle the ruling coalition and embrace nationalism

to tackle the domestic challenges. His new coalition partners sought to bring the Greek-Turkish issues back onto the agenda. Turkey's involvement in the civil war in Libya indeed provided the opportunity for the return of Westphalian concerns in the form of Turkey's claims of maritime jurisdiction in the Eastern Mediterranean. This, in fact, enabled Erdoğan to broaden the popular support base for his Moslem Brotherhood-first policy in the Middle East with the nationalistic segments of the society. It proved to be a very short-lived moment and led to the escalation of tension between Greece and Turkey. This time, the character of EU involvement also changed. Rather than the whole EU being engaged, France and Germany sought ways of dealing with the escalation in the Eastern Mediterranean. In other words, individual EU members rather than the EU itself attempted to influence the situation in the traditionally contested territories between the two countries.

The return of History and the prospects for the future

What are the prospects for a real and lasting consolidation between the two countries, with or without Turkey's EU connection? Can we identify a set of ideas that can form a mutually accepted path for a historic 'Aegean' settlement? Can the EU help or play a role in any way to forward the relationship between the two countries? Our conviction is that cooperation and security in the Aegean can be achieved if the two countries – governments and people – succeed in redefining their interests so as to allow a security regime-type of relationship to develop. On a more analytical level, a

redefinition of interests can be the result of the two actors' power location and capabilities, as well as the domestic interplay on both sides of the Aegean.

The rationale should be to create the appropriate conditions for a political and diplomatic 'peace dividend', by pursuing a strategy of mutual engagement. It is a strategy that seeks to maintain and enhance Greek bilateral relations with Turkey as much as possible in the various policy realms. It refers to a policy of increasing contact and producing a widening network of relationships.

Apart from the obvious human costs, the damages of a putative Greek-Turkish clash would be genuinely tragic in nature. War would undoubtedly undermine stability on a trans-regional scale. With the potential for destructiveness and escalation far greater today than in the past, a clash would have profound implications for all involved.

It would also have operational consequences for the US, NATO, and the EU. In strategic terms, a conflict could lead to the permanent estrangement of Turkey from the West and extremely high economic and security costs for Greece. The consequences for travel, tourism, trade, and investment, to name just a few of the affected areas of behavior, would be devastating. The rapprochement has, therefore, a sound strategic rationale on all sides.

The Political and Strategic Qualifications ^[32]

Greece and Turkey share common land and sea borders, and they both have

[32] This section draws on Ifantis, 2009, pp. 191-1922.

extensive coastlines along the Aegean Sea. The geographic imperatives of both countries can moderate actions as well as exacerbate them. These imperatives are long-term and can transcend governments and ruling elites. They are also interconnected so that if one imperative is altered, it will probably affect others. Within this framework, a set of issues that have remained constant over time should be indicated.[33]

First, it is imperative to enhance communication at the decision-making levels and to actively engage in the process of clarifying policy positions. It is hard to believe, but the level of misunderstanding between the two is extremely high. For instance, according to a recent public opinion poll carried out by Aydın et al., Greece ranks fourth in the list of countries that pose a threat to Turkey. However, it should be granted that the Turkish public seems to be split on this account as on many other issues, with 38.7 % of the Turkish respondents viewing Greece as a threat, while 33.5 % do not.[34] Negative perceptions and misperceptions about the real substance of their mutual positions dominate the public sphere in both countries and feed into the traditional canvas of mistrust. Both tend to stand their ground without appreciating each other's concerns. Breaking the cycle of mistrust is critical.

Second, progress in Greek-Turkish relations should be possible, even when Athens and Ankara have politically weak governments. It is true that modern governments in post-industrial countries are prompted to adopt cooperative relations. Nevertheless, some limited but important steps can be taken, even when governments are weak. Regardless of the

relative strength of each government, the militaries of Greece and Turkey will continue to conduct exercises in the Aegean, pursue their national objectives, and protect their interests. This factor normally leads to a regular cycle of increased tensions and serious incidents, some of which involve loss of life and military equipment. But even weak governments want to keep friction to a minimum. In that framework, it is important that each government remains sensitive toward the concerns of public opinion on the other side. Further, even weak governments want to eliminate or limit the impact of domestic factors that could contribute to the continuation of the conflict, such as serious domestic political, economic, and social problems. However, weak governments are more likely to be tempted to resort to a 'foreign policy adventure', to deflect attention from their domestic problems. Clearly, therefore, the exercise of strong leadership in both countries is highly desirable, and for some, *sine qua non*.

Third, it is better to move slowly on the Aegean disputes. There is a strong security culture of volatile expectations in both countries. Perceptions need to be changed gradually, trust must be built, and bureaucracies and populations must be prepared for change. Avoiding high expectations reduces the chance of great disappointment and disillusionment. There is a deep-rooted conviction that if a country 'loses out' on an Aegean issue, it is almost impossible to return to the status quo. These are not the types of issues for interested parties to experiment with, and it is counterproductive to pressure either country into taking too many risks without having valid expectations of an acceptable outcome. In that respect, a low-key, low publicity approach on both sides, backed by continuing dialogue that keeps hold of the

[32] This section draws on Ifantis, 2009, pp. 191-1922.

[33] S. Ross Norton, "Geography Never Changes", *The Strategic Regional Report*, Vol. 3, No. 4, June/July 1998

[34] Mustafa Aydın et.al., *Türk Dış Politikası Kamuoyu Algılar Araştırması* (15 June 2021), p. 41 https://www.khas.edu.tr/sites/khas.edu.tr/files/inline-files/TDPA2021_KHAS_WEBRAPOR-BASIN_08062021.pdf (Accessed on 16 November 2021).

notion of common interests as the basic premise, can be extremely helpful.

Fourth, one should not underestimate the importance of geography. The 1996 Imia crisis brought both countries to the brink of war. In 2020, the naval stand-off in the Eastern Mediterranean was a clear demonstration that not much has changed, and the chances of a “hot” accident are very real, while the risk of escalation is quite high.

Fifth, specific Greek-Turkish disputes should not be viewed in isolation without, however, being formally linked into ‘package deals’. There is a delicate interconnection among them. For example, Greece’s claim to national airspace of ten nautical miles may appear to have nothing in common with Turkey’s pursuit of a share of the Aegean seabed. Yet no Greek government would consider changing its policy until there was a mutually agreed settlement on the delimitation of the seabed. To do otherwise would be viewed as a sign of weakness and could thus adversely affect Greece’s negotiating position on this issue or any other bilateral issue.

Sixth, Greece and Turkey do not view their differences in the same way. What is important to one may not be perceived as such by the other. For example, for Greece, Cyprus is a question that can adversely affect a broad range of bilateral issues (although Greek governments consistently oppose a formal linkage of Cyprus and the Aegean). For Turkey, Cyprus is an issue on which the room for compromise is rather narrow, and no progress can be made without recognition of the north’s

political equality status.

Seventh, working on “low politics” is important. Progress on “soft issues” like trade, investment, tourism, culture, etc., could produce a consensus on the benefits of working together. However, the burden of geopolitics would always negatively affect the fragile state of play and the sustainability of cooperation, given the very limited degree of economic interdependence.[35]

Finally, the active and balanced involvement of international actors (mainly the United States, NATO, The EU) in the confidence-building process is clearly vital, and for that matter, instrumental. For Ankara, NATO remains the most preferred and relatively more reliable interlocutor in managing the competition between the two.

The unraveling of full membership negotiations that were supposed to anchor Turkey’s political and economic development in the EU did not result in the concomitant collapse of the institutional framework that would encourage Turkey to pursue good neighborly relations with Greece. It took another decade and a new regional context (non-European) to dismantle this framework. The fact that the Turkish willingness to engage Greece positively survived the membership negotiations with the EU may indicate that the parties no longer need such profound incentives from the EU to reconcile their differences. While Turkey remains committed at least rhetorically to the ultimate goal of full membership, a realistic positive agenda may help develop a framework institutionally less binding and offer sufficient constructive

[35] The Turkish and Greek NGOs received substantial grants from the EU in the first decade of the rapprochement to promote dialogue between the two peoples. Assuming that the people-to-people contacts have gained sufficient traction and no longer need EU support to sustain them, the EU significantly reduced grants for projects aimed at promoting civil society dialogue between the two countries. Interview with Sefer Güvenç, Secretary General of the Foundation for Lausanne Treaty Refugees (“Lozan Mübadilleri Vakfı”), 23 April 2017, Beyoğlu, İstanbul.

ambiguity for all the parties involved. At any rate, such alternatives should be developed and presented not as the choices of a particular member state or member states such as Germany and France but as reflecting the collective will of the EU. The fact remains that German initiatives might have saved the day for the entire EU on issues such as refugees. In other words, intergovernmentalism might achieve immediate practical results, but it has also resulted in the decoupling of conditionality from the idea of creating a well-governed ring of states around the EU.

Concluding Remarks

The state of relations between Greece and Turkey is a product of the attitudes and perceptions of ruling elites and the general publics, operating within global and regional settings. However, the developments of the past three to four years fit well with the following propositions: country dyads with advanced and interdependent economies and consolidated democracies (sustained by civil societies) can avoid conflict and choose cooperation as an optimal foreign policy goal. If Turkey's gamble on meeting the criteria of EU membership is won, future generations will be talking about Turkey and Greece in a fashion similar to that describing the Franco-German reconciliation after World War II.

The differences between Turkey and Greece are not new, but as long as they remain unresolved, there is a chance that some unforeseen incident could touch off open conflict and large-scale

warfare. Continuing disputes over Cyprus, over the Aegean, over relations with the EU, in relations with NATO, and areas of bilateral and multilateral relations with other regional and extra-regional actors all have the potential of threatening bilateral and regional peace, security, and stability. The history of the two countries' bilateral relations shows that such a situation might repeat itself more easily than many think. Regardless of the merits and demerits of the case of each of the disputants, the central issue is whether Greece and Turkey will be better off in a situation of protracted conflict, as compared to entering into a new phase of mutual and active engagement and even cooperation. The impact of any clash on political, social, and economic progress will be devastating. War is unthinkable because, to begin with, it will isolate both belligerents from their Western institutional affiliations.

At present, the EU lacks both the leverage and credibility in influencing Turkey's decision calculus. In the absence of the promise of full membership, it has failed to offer a viable alternative for reinvigorating Turkey-EU relations with conditions and rewards for good neighborly relations. Even the process that would lead to the upgrading and modernization of the EU-Customs Union, the core institution of the relationship, has stalled. Overcoming the current stalemate may signal the political will on both sides to revitalize their relations. However, as the EU is no longer a serious consideration in Turkish foreign policy, it may take time to develop a new framework to replace the one which has sustained Turkish-Greek rapprochement for about two decades.



TURKEY AND EUROPE

CHALLENGING PARTNERS

TURKEY AS A PARTNER

AND CHALLENGE FOR EUROPEAN SECURITY

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