

# THE FUTURE OF TURKISH-GREEK RELATIONS

*This article argues that Turkey's accession process to the European Union will offer the best incentives for Turkey and Greece to resolve their bilateral disputes in the years to come. None of the parties concerned would find it rational to halt this process. Besides, observers will also likely notice that the dynamics of Turkish-Greek bilateral disputes will increasingly be detached from the dynamics of the Cyprus dispute. Greece will probably play the role of pacifier whenever the Greek Cypriots attempt to gain concessions from Turkey during Turkey's long accession process.*

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**T**urkey's accession process to the European Union will offer the best incentives for Turkey and Greece to resolve their bilateral disputes in the years to come. None of the parties concerned would find it rational to halt this process. The closer Turkey comes to EU membership, the more likely Turkey and Greece are to reach a final settlement in ongoing disputes. In addition to the emergence of collective interests alongside the Europeanization processes, for a true Turkish-Greek reconciliation to emerge, one should also expect that a collective identity form between these two countries. For short-term tactical considerations to give way to long-term ideological considerations, both Turkey's place in the EU needs to be secured and Greece's role in this development needs to be noted by the Turks. For realpolitik security practices in this particular region to evaporate, namely efforts in creating a strong military force at home and seeking alliances abroad, a collective identity needs to be forged between Turkey and Greece. Observers will also likely notice that the dynamics of Turkish-Greek bilateral disputes will increasingly be detached from the dynamics of the Cyprus dispute. Greece will probably play the role of pacifier whenever the Greek Cypriots attempt to gain concessions from Turkey during their long accession process.

### ***What Rationality Dictates?***

Whereas in the past seeing the European Union as an external alliance or a security provider against Turkey seemed rational to a majority of Greeks, this will hardly be the case in the years to come. Greek politicians and people alike have gradually started to realize that Greece's security strongly hinges on the extent that Turkey meets requirements for accession to the EU. That is why the old Greek dictum 'the best Turk is a dead Turk' is now giving way to the new dictum 'the best Turk is a European Turk.' For Turkey's EU accession process to go uninterrupted, Greece must cease viewing the EU as an ally against Turkey. Without Turkey's Europeanization, neither Greek interests nor its European identity will be secured.

Without a Europeanizing Turkey, Greece can never complete its own Europeanization process, which was set into motion by the first Simitis government in 1996. For Greece to move from a 'zone of danger and turmoil' to a 'zone of peace,' Turkey's march towards full EU membership will play a critical role. A Turkey that finds itself estranged from the European Union and pessimistic about the prospects of its eventual membership in the EU might resort to realpolitik security practices in and around the Aegean Sea. In that event, Greece would have no choice but reciprocate. The Greek government would have to allocate a significant part of their national income to military modernization programs.

Greece is one of the few states in the EU that suffers from territorial problems with its neighbors. For Greece to be able to join the first tier of EU members, among which interstate relations is based on the idea of peaceful coexistence and the absence of wars, the nature of Turkish-Greek relations needs to be characterized by friendship rather than rivalry. Rivalry with Turkey would keep Greece stuck in realpolitik that would in turn make it difficult, if not impossible, for Greece to jump into a zone of peace. Therefore, Turkey's ongoing Europeanization process is fundamentally important for Greece's national interests. Greece can not become a truly European country while Turkey remains outside the European Union. The resolution of the Turkish-Greek disputes would not only increase Turkey's chances of joining the EU but also help bolster Greece's European image.

Even though a significant number of Turkish people are inclined to think that Greece would attempt to extract concessions from Turkey while the latter is trying to meet accession criteria, this author finds such a possibility unlikely. Greek demands from Turkey in the Aegean Sea and pro-Greek Cypriot solutions in the Cyprus dispute only help drive further wedges between the EU and Turkey. Feeling that its EU membership prospects are damaged by Greece's efforts, Turkey would likely up the ante and adopt more realpolitik foreign and security policy practices in the region. There is nothing for Greece to gain from pursuing a strategy that would hinder Turkey's EU accession process.

Currently, it seems that there is a consensus inside the EU about the appropriateness of anchoring Turkey to Europe through the accession process. Thanks to Turkey's impressive attempts at reform since 1999 and the changing geopolitical conditions of the post 9/11 era, an EU-wide consensus has gradually emerged over the last years that Turkey's incorporation into the Union would serve EU interests. Today's Turkey is regarded as more European than the Turkey of the pre-1999 era. If leading members of the European Union regard Turkey as more European, Greece could hardly dare to disrupt Turkey's relations with the EU. If Greece attempts to create tension in EU-Turkish relations, it might be costly to Greece. Not only would Turkey resist such attempts, but Greece's partners within the EU would also rebuke them. This would certainly detract from Greece's image in the EU.

In the past, it was a relatively easy strategy for Greece to point out Turkey's non-European identity, or to help contribute to Turkey's "non-Europeanness," when the majority of EU members also questioned Turkey's European identity.

However, this situation seems to have significantly changed since the confirmation of Turkey's EU membership candidacy in December 1999. Since

then, Turkey has gone through a painful reform process that has brought the country closer to the European Union, not only with regard to the structure of state and society, but also, in terms of Turkey's foreign policy practices. Both democratization and liberalization processes have taken root inside the country. Two significant examples in this regard are Turkey's reconciliation with EU members on the European Security and Defense Policy in late 2002 and Turkey's active support to the resolution of the Cyprus dispute within the framework of the Annan Plan.<sup>1</sup> The coming of the Justice and Development Party to government in late 2002 and the growing realization on behalf of Turkish generals that Turkey's EU membership would serve Turkey's national interests have added further impetus to Turkey's Europeanization efforts. Turkey's efforts to Europeanize at home and abroad and the EU's growing willingness to embrace Turkey institutionally have made it difficult for Greece to cling to policies of negative conditionality vis-à-vis Turkey. For example, by sabotaging Turkey's European journey unless Turkey meets Greek demands in the Aegean Sea and Cyprus.

The Kostas Karamanlis government in Greece has openly supported the EU's decision to start accession talks with Turkey. Informed observers could not count Greece among the countries which contributed to the short-lived crises in Luxembourg where EU leaders discussed how to formulate the Negotiations Framework Document that will principally define the mechanisms through which Turkey's accession talks with the EU would be conducted.

This 'restraint' mentality also applies to Turkey. Turkey would increasingly find it difficult to turn a blind eye to what Greece will say in the future, for Greece was one of the few countries inside the EU that openly argued for the start of the accession talks with Turkey. Whenever the Greek Cypriots on the one hand and France and Austria on the other tried to prevent the EU from initiating accession talks with Turkey, Greece proved to be one of the few countries that tried to demonstrate the futility of such attempts. Despite its marginal status within the EU, Greece wields veto power in the EU's decision-making processes. This

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<sup>1</sup> The ESDP dispute between Turkey and the EU concerned the disagreement between the two sides over the issue of EU's request to have free access to NATO's military and planning capabilities. Basically, while the EU wanted to have free access to NATO's capabilities in case the EU put on the ground 'EU-led non-Article 5 type military operations', Turkey wanted to see that EU-NATO cooperation takes place on a case by case basis and that Turkey as a NATO member wields its veto power over the modalities of EU-NATO cooperation.

Annan Plan was proposed by the Secretary General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan in November 2002 in an effort to help the conflicting parties on the island find a political settlement prior to the entry of the island to the EU. Its main rationale was to help the EU deal with the membership of the island in a cost-free way in the sense that the principles of solution on the island accord with the founding principles of the EU integration process. The plan was subject to numerous revisions after its first introduction in late 2002. The final version of the plan was put on the referendum in the island on 24 April 2004. While the majority of the Turkish Cypriots voted in favor of the plan, the overwhelming majority of the Greek Cypriots cast their votes negatively.

alone should be taken into consideration by Ankara. If Turkish-Greek relations soured, it would be much easier for the Greek Cypriots to secure the support of Athens against Turkey, for the historically well-grounded anti-Turkish character of Greek politics could easily dominate the policies of Athens towards Turkey in times of crises.

Besides, Ankara's adoption of an intransigent attitude towards Greece would certainly be in contradiction with ongoing domestic reforms. Europeanization includes both domestic and external dimensions and these should go in parallel to each other. Given the growing skepticism of the EU's public opinion about the appropriateness of admitting Turkey as a member, Turkey's performance in foreign and security policies might prove critical for Turkish politicians to help allay anxieties in the EU. Europeanization in foreign and security policy, particularly with regards to Greece, would play a significant role in the elimination of such doubts about Turkey's "Europeanness." Turkey should make use of the current reconciliatory mood in its relations with Greece and should take utmost care to avoid sending nationalist and intransigent signals across the Aegean Sea.

The prospects of a collective identity forming between Turkey and Greece would certainly increase if Turkey changed its perception of Greece's identity and role inside the European Union. Previously, Turkish foreign policy makers used to see Greece as a relatively insignificant country in their relations with the European Union. Greece was assumed to possess no significant leverage inside the EU so as to affect the nature of Turkey-EU relations. When Greece's nationalistic and parochial foreign policies in the early 1990s were seriously criticized by her partners inside the EU, especially concerning Greece's recalcitrant policies with respect to the Macedonian question and her pro-Serbian attitudes during the interethnic warfare in former Yugoslavia, Turkey could easily depict Greece as a non-European country. Greece was seen in Ankara as a Balkan country inside the EU, rather than as a European country in the Balkans. Under such conditions, it would have been unlikely for the successive Turkish governments throughout the 1990s to accommodate Greece's claims in the Aegean Sea and Cyprus.

There was a consensus in the Turkish capital that if the leading EU members themselves had wanted to see Turkey inside the EU, they would have inevitably put pressure on Greece not to sabotage EU relations with Turkey. The logical conclusion was that Turkey would not have to rush to contribute to the resolution of the Turkish-Greek disputes. Therefore, Turkish policy makers believed that the closer the European Union came towards Turkey, the faster they would take pains to accommodate Greece's claims in and around the Aegean Sea. In one way or another, the nature of Turkish-Greek relations hinged

on the nature of Turkish-EU relations. Improvements in the latter would likely produce improvements in the former, not the other way around.

Rather than Turkey attempting to sort out bilateral disputes with Greece in their own right, Ankara governments tried to use temporal improvements in bilateral relations in order to curry favor with the European Union. The end goal was not to reach a final settlement with Greece, but to help create a positive atmosphere in the region lest the EU think that Turkey was not contributing to the resolution of the “borders problem” with its neighbors. The atmosphere preceding the Helsinki EU summit in December 1999 was exactly in conformity with such claims. As explained by the then Turkish Foreign Minister İsmail Cem, “the number one Turkish concern in cultivating a positive atmosphere with Greece was to please the EU rather than resolve Turkish-Greek disputes.”

However, just as Greece’s view of Turkey has started to change since 1999, Turkey’s view of Greece has also started to change. Turkish foreign and security policy makers now view today’s Greece as more European and less Balkan. Some particular developments have engendered this perception in Turkey. First, Turkey has increasingly observed that the leading members of the EU have overtly supported Greece’s views on the Cyprus dispute and the Aegean Sea claims. The 1999 Helsinki conclusions of the EU summit meeting for the first time constructed a strong linkage between Turkey’s EU membership prospects and the resolution of Turkish-Greek disputes. The EU made it very clear that Turkey could not join the EU unless bilateral problems between Greece and Turkey were resolved once and for all. The accession partnership documents and the EU commission’s yearly progress reports also testify to this close linkage. What is noteworthy is the EU’s changing attitude toward the Cyprus dispute. Whereas in the past EU members tended to adopt a relatively impartial stance on the Cyprus dispute; since 1997 they have openly supported Greek views on this issue. It was frequently heard in Brussels that Turkey should not have a veto over the EU membership of Cyprus and that the island could join the EU even if the political reunification of the island did not precede it.

Second, Greece’s European image has started to improve, not only in the eyes of its partners within the Union, but also in Ankara following the attempts of successive Simits governments at accelerating the pace of Greece’s accession to the European Monetary Zone. Such political goals on the part of Greek governments dictated a rapprochement with Turkey. Economic sources allocated to military modernization would need to be channeled to Greece’s economic modernization policies. The more Greece adopted conciliatory policies towards Turkey, the more Turkish policy makers viewed Greece as European.

Third, Turkey quickly discovered that following more conciliatory policies towards Greece and treating the latter as a European country would also be in Turkey's national interests. That is why the current Turkish government has embraced the view that the more Turkey contributed to the resolution of the Turkish-Greek problems, particularly the Cyprus dispute, the more likely its European identity and security-producing image would be noted by EU members.

The main reason for the upsurge in Turkish willingness to address bilateral disputes with Greece is the changing balance of power between these two countries in favor of Turkey. This increase in Turkey's power stemmed from the following factors. First, the military struggle against the PKK terrorist organization came to a successful end through the apprehension of its leader, Abdullah Öcalan. This has emboldened Turkish authorities to set into motion a detailed liberalization and democratization process inside the country. Second, both Greek standing inside the EU and her international image was badly impacted by the fact that some Greek officials and officers were caught in 1999 lending support to the PKK's leader Öcalan, as the latter was trying to seek refuge in Greece.<sup>2</sup> Third, Europeanization in Greek and Turkish contexts appears to have led to different conclusions as far as the power capabilities of both countries are concerned. While Greece's Europeanization seems to imply the downgrading of Greece's role in affecting Turkey-EU relations, Turkey's Europeanization has meant the opposite. While the former means that Greece is becoming an ordinary EU member without having an impact on the future course of EU integration process, the latter case refers to a situation in which Turkey's significance has increased as far as its impact on the future course and identity of the EU.

### ***Cyprus drops out as a stumbling block***

The future of Turkish-Greek relations will also be increasingly detached from the dynamics of the Cyprus dispute. Even though Greece and Turkey did not see eye to eye on the details of what the ideal settlement of the Cyprus dispute should be, they both sign on to the view that any solution of the Cyprus dispute should respect the bi-zonal and bi-communal nature of the island and the fundamental security concerns of the parties concerned. In this regard, the last two Greek governments did give support to the attempts at reaching a settlement on the island in line with the United Nations framework and historical facts on

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<sup>2</sup> This point as also noted by Greek observers. See for example, Keridis, Dimitris. 2001, "Domestic Politics and Foreign Policy: Greek policy towards Turkey," In Dimitris Keridis and Charles M. Perry, eds., *Greek-Turkish Relations in the era of Globalisation*, (Virginia: Brassey's Inc), pp. 2-18.  
Heraclides, Alexis. 2002, "Greek-Turkish Relations from Discord to Détente: A Preliminary Evaluation," *The Review of International Affairs* 1(3): 17-32

the ground. For example both the Simitis and Karamanlis governments supported the latest version of the Annan plan and made it clear that Greece would approve if Greek Cypriots voted for it in referenda. However, Greek Cypriots overwhelmingly voted against the plan in April 2004.

This shows that the historical alliance between Greece and Greek Cypriots, as embodied through the motto “Greek Cypriots decide and Greece supports” has started to crumble. Although Greece overtly lobbied for the EU membership of Cyprus and made it clear that the EU should not cave in to Turkish warnings that the EU membership of Cyprus would be illegal before the solution of the dispute, this does not mean that successive Greek and Greek Cypriots governments concurred on the ideal solution of the dispute. What happened most of the time throughout the 1990s was that the successive Greek governments felt besieged by the Greek Cypriot lobby in Athens and found it politically costly not to back Greek Cypriot claims.

In the future, it seems irrational for Greece to fully support Greek Cypriot claims, which do not foresee the possibility of power sharing arrangements with Turkish Cypriots. The reasons are as follows: First, the credentials of Turkey’s European identity have significantly increased following Turkey’s adamant support to the Annan Plan. Turkey now has high moral standing in its international relations with regard to this issue. Today few would argue that it was Turkey that hindered the resolution of the Cyprus dispute. Second, even though Greek Cypriots succeeded in joining the EU, their rejection of the Annan plan was harshly criticized by the European Union. The consensus view inside the EU is now that Turkey and Turkish Cypriots worked for the resolution of the dispute and that Greek Cypriots did not pay any price for their intransigent position. Even though the Turkish side voted for the Annan Plan, the EU did not keep any of its promises to improve the financial situation of Northern Cyprus. The number of the Europeans who once thought that the EU membership process of the island would produce catalytic effects in the resolution of the dispute is now decreasing. Third, both the United States and influential EU members alike wholly supported the Annan Plan. While they now feel increasingly grateful for Turkey’s positive stance during the negotiation process, they feel equally upset and disappointed by the short-sighted attitude of Greek Cypriots. All these factors combined make it difficult and risky for Greece to lend unconditional support to Greek Cypriot policies vis-à-vis Turkey.

### ***Which scenario?***

The most likely scenario concerning the future of Turkish-Greek relations transpires as follows: Turkey and Greece continue to live as if the Aegean Sea disputes do not exist. In order not to derail Turkey’s accession process with the

EU, which both see in their national interests, they do not bring the Aegean Sea disputes to the negotiating table. Their passive stance might eventually help transform the Aegean Sea disputes from being 'security issues' into 'non-security issues.' They would probably not sign a formal treaty sanctifying the current status quo as the final solution but their current non-committal approach might help observers conclude that there has emerged an unseen settlement in the region.

In this scenario both countries might accept that they have some territorial problems in the Aegean Sea waiting for a final settlement, but they do not rush to find a final settlement soon. They would index the speed and quality of bilateral peace talks to the speed and quality of Turkey's accession negotiations with the European Union. Any final settlement would be considered here as a part of general Turkey-EU negotiations. Given that foreign and security policy issues are covered in the last chapters of the accession framework, Turkey and Greece would probably wait for the completion of other chapters before delving into the details of the Aegean Sea disputes as a part of Turkey's accession criteria. The most likely date of any prospective settlement of the Aegean Sea disputes would likely correspond to the date when Turkey would finally sign the accession treaty with the EU.

In this scenario Greece's position would be more critical than Turkey's, for the Greek politicians would be exposed to Greek Cypriot pressures to force Turkey into concessions while the latter would be trying to meet accession criteria. This scenario expects that Greece would not succumb to such Greek Cypriot pressures, for Greece's national interest would foresee Turkey's Europeanization alongside the accession process.

There are a number of reasons that increase the viability of this scenario. First, Turkey's determination to join the EU has increased. This would certainly curtail Turkey's realpolitik attitudes towards Greece. Turkey is gradually becoming aware of the fact that Greek support is critical for the continuation of an uninterrupted accession process. Second, influential members of the European Union have gradually become more receptive to the idea that Turkey's inclusion in the EU would serve EU interests. Their determination to see Turkey in the EU will increase further while Turkey is becoming more Europeanized and the EU embraces a wider strategic outlook. The costs of rejecting Turkey will increase as Turkey comes closer to EU membership. The more time passes, the less likely EU members are to tolerate Greek Cypriots' intransigent attitude towards Turkey and Turkish Cypriots. Third, Turkey now has the moral high ground on the Cyprus dispute. In the event current trends continue, the international community would likely note that the real obstacle to the solution of the Cyprus dispute in a bi-zonal and bi-communal framework stems from the

Greek Cypriot side. Hence more pressure on Greek Cypriots. Lastly, the United States actively supports Turkey's aspirations to join the EU. Its determination to lobby for Turkey's membership in numerous European capitals will likely increase in the years to come, for Turkey's international position is increasingly becoming more critical for the success of the US policies to defeat religiously inspired radical terrorism.