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TURKISH-GREEK RELATIONS: A FRAGILE STABILITY BETWEEN NEIGHBORS ON THE TWO SHORES OF THE AEGEAN SEA

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ABSTRACT

This article considers the nature of Turkish-Greek relations, focusing on the question of how these should be characterized. This is an important topic not only because there is a lack of a clear definition of the situation between the two countries in the literature, but also because providing a greater clarity of the issues about Turkish-Greek relations can assist in the long-term envisioning of a possible path that the two countries might take in the future. Employing a descriptive analysis, the article shows that a state of conflict rather than cooperation has determined the evolution of relations between Turkey and Greece. This sheds light on the intractable nature of the problems between the two countries, whether in Cyprus, the Aegean Sea, or the Eastern Mediterranean. The article concludes that Turkish-Greek relations are characterized by a historically grounded condition of fragile stability,

with permanent tension and possible crisis prevailing, even if conflicts are frozen and war is not foreseen.

Keywords: Turkey-Greece, Aegean Sea, Cyprus, East Mediterranean**.**

INTRODUCTION

A brief background of Turkish-Greek relations will give one an idea about the fragile nature of the connection between these two countries. In the absence of war, there is an uncertain stability punctured by exceptional periods of rapprochement. This article explores this delicate situation between neighbors on opposite shores of the Aegean Sea, concentrating on the major problem areas, namely the island Republic of Cyprus, Aegean Sea, and Eastern Mediterranean region. In doing so, it seeks to characterize or define the relationship between these three areas of concern.

A historical perspective on Turkish-Greek relations would reveal certain periods of rapprochement, which were but short-lived. Following the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923, for example, the 1930s signified a cooperative phase. However, "Turkey and Greece could improve their harmony only when there was a common threat and… they were encouraged to cooperate against this threat by an outside power that had leverage over them." (Gürel, 1993, p.13, as cited in Aydın, 1997, p.113). Thus, the 1930s' rapprochement between Ankara and Athens developed with Britain's encouragement against Italian expansionism. Similarly, in the first half of the 1950s, the encouragement of the US against the common Soviet threat promoted a second period of cooperation, which resulted in the Balkan Pact (1953) (Gürel, 1993, p.13, as cited in Aydın, 1997, p.113). At this time also (starting from 1952), Greece and Turkey shared a path to Western-guaranteed security under the NATO umbrella (Baharçiçek, 2010). Nevertheless, tension rather than cooperation determined the course of relations, especially after Turkey's military intervention in Cyprus in 1974.

The Turkish intervention in Cyprus had spillover effects in Aegean Sea disputes, and Turkey and Greece twice came close to war (in 1976 and 1987) (Bölükbaşı, 1992, pp.34-37). Meanwhile, in 1981, Greece became a member of the EU, after which the EU too, became a determiner in Turkish-Greek relations, with Greece using its power

of veto against Turkey. An unexpected development in 1988 was the initiation of the Davos spirit, which signified a new détente but faded within a year because of a lack of public support. Overall, therefore, except for two periods of cooperation in the 1930s and 1950s and the short-lived Davos spirit in 1988, tension tended to characterize the state of Turkish-Greek relations up until the 1990s.

In this context, the rapprochement from the late 1990s to the first half of the 2000s created a hopeful perspective for the future. With well-intentioned, collaborative leaders, the media playing a positive role, and civil society in solidarity, an atmosphere of trust was created in the knowledge that Turkey and Greece would be rewarded by the EU. However, the upswing in Turkish-Greek relations that culminated at the end of the 1990s also turned out to be not permanent.

This positive development was actually reversed, partly because even in those years, the rapprochement in soft power areas was not reflected in the hard power issues. Instead, these were just frozen. When it comes to Turkey and Greece, the existence of concrete problem areas, whether brought into the present from a historical inheritance, or those emerging as new issues to be dealt with, have always kept alive the possibility of a "crisis" between these two countries, especially in Cyprus, the Aegean Sea, and the Eastern Mediterranean. The cost of war for both sides has been deemed so high that common sense always prevailed. Hence, despite the tension and arms built-up, and crises were limited before they became wars by mutual measures of deterrence, occasionally assisted by the mediation of third parties. Therefore, in reviewing the historical, as well as recent developments in the relations between the two neighbors, this article primarily maintains the alternative view that the relations between Athens and Greece are determined by conflict despite the occasional instances of rapprochement.

Against this background, the main subject addressed in this article concerns the nature of Turkish-Greek relations; specifically, how should these be characterized? Within this context, the following key questions are considered: (1) How have Turkish-Greek relations evolved, and (2) What concrete problems do the parties face and from which perspectives? The article is structured as two major sections which will address these two key questions.

In the first section, a narrative of the evolution of Turkish-Greek relations from the 1990s to the 2020s is presented (with a cut-off

time at the end of 2022, i.e., prior to the Turkey-Syria earthquake and Turkish elections scheduled for May 2023). The first sub-section covers the period from the 1990s to 2000s. This is characterized by conflicting interests between the two countries in the 1990s, followed by an upswing around the turn of the millennium and then great hopes. The period of euphoria was short-lived, however, ending as early as the second half of the 2000s. This is reviewed in the next sub-section, which proceeds to subsequent and recent developments in the relationship. Then, in the second section, concrete problem areas are considered, namely, the Cyprus problem (as a multilateral, historical problem area), Aegean Sea issues (as an ongoing problem area), and the Eastern Mediterranean (as a new conflict area). In this context, while the first section reveals that a state of conflict rather than cooperation has determined the evolution of relations, the second section sheds light on the difficulty of defining the status of the problem areas between the two countries. The conclusion—of a fragile stability—is augmented with perspectives on the future of Turkish-Greek relations.

EVOLUTION OF TURKISH-GREEK RELATIONS: A DEPENDENCY ON MULTIPLE FACTORS

In order to appreciate the nature of Turkish-Greek relations, an analysis of their evolution is instructive. First, it should be noted that the relations are dependent on multiple factors, ranging from the economy through the role played by civil society to the actions of the EU and the specific conditions the two countries face in a turbulent international environment, including the roles played by the governments in Ankara and Athens. The two sub-sections below emerge as an effort to evaluate all these factors. Notably, one may observe various obstacles to the establishment of a cooperative environment between the two countries despite certain openings. In this regard, the 1990s were characterized by conflicting interests followed, in the early 2000s, by an upswing in Turkish-Greek relations, which was short-lived.

Conflicting Interests in The 1990S to Upswing in The Early 2000S

For Turkish-Greek relations, the 1990s was mostly determined by security considerations within the overall psychology of distrust created by the Cyprus and Aegean Sea disputes. In fact, Turkey

and Greece appear to have been the only two NATO countries that increased their military spending after the Cold War ended (Öniş & Yılmaz, 2008, p.141). In 1996, they came to the brink of war (again) over a tiny, uninhabited islet named *Imia/Kardak*. Among the deeper causes of this close call was the unclear legal status of the islets in the Aegean Sea. The crisis only ended with the direct intervention of US president Bill Clinton, and it was only superficially resolved (i.e., without addressing the underlying issues). Thereafter, a new problem was added to the Aegean disputes between Turkey and Greece, that of territorial claims in areas of uncertain demarcation or otherwise problematic under international law, referred to as "grey zones" (Demirtaş Coşkun, 2001, p.210).

The Cyprus question also continued to hamper Turkish-Greek relations in the 1990s, especially with the Greek Cypriot decision in 1997 to deploy Russian S-300 ground-to-air missiles in Cyprus. This met with a strong reaction from Turkey and Turkish Cypriots. Ankara threatened to strike at the missiles if they were deployed in Cyprus. In the end, under strong diplomatic pressure from Washington and London, Greece avoided conflict by having the S-300 missiles deployed in Crete.

In this environment, as Bahçeli (2000) explained, an "intensified arms race between the two rivals, and the extension of their competition to regions where they were barely active before the end of the Cold War (namely the Balkans, the Caucasus, and the Middle East)" was to "fuel Greek-Turkish rivalry through much of the 1990s." In the former Yugoslavia, during the wars in Croatia and Bosnia, Turkey and Greece supported opposing parties, which led to new scenarios of the escalation of conflict between Turkey and Greece (Siegls, 2002, p.43).

The last crisis of the last century occurred when, in 1999, the leader of the Kurdish Workers Party (*Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê*, PKK), Abdullah Öcalan, fled to Kenya with alleged Greek involvement. There was certainly Greek assistance in Kenya for Öcalan since he hid in the residence of the Greek ambassador there. Given Turkey's violent and "dirty" struggle with the PKK since 1983, in which tens of thousands had died and millions been uprooted from their homes, the then president, Süleyman Demirel, declared Greece a "rogue state" for providing support for "PKK terrorism." (Kramer, 2000, p.173). Further elevation of the crisis was prevented when the hardline

Greek foreign minister, Theodoros Pangalos, was replaced by George Papandreao, who was more conciliatory.

Against this background, Bahçeli (2000, p.457) observed the following:

> During much of the 1990s, Turkish leaders… accused Greece of acting against Turkey in virtually every area vital to Turkish interest: Cyprus, the Aegean, EU relations with Turkey, and Kurdish separatism. For their part, Greek leaders… accused Turkey of assuming a more aggressive stance towards Greece, for making new territorial claims in the Aegean, and for consolidating the division of Cyprus.

Yet, it was around the same time as the Öcalan incident that Turkish-Greek relations saw another upswing. An agreement reached between Turkish Foreign Minister İsmail Cem and Greek Foreign Minister George Papandreou during their meeting in New York on June 30, 1999, opened a new era of cooperation. The devastating earthquake in Marmara in 1999, followed by another in Athens, drew reciprocal humane responses to the tragedy, which assisted the rapprochement between the two countries. More influential, however, was Turkey's acceptance as a candidate country to the EU at the Helsinki Summit of December 1999. After that, a total of nine bilateral agreements were signed by representatives of the two countries during visits in January and February 2000 in an atmosphere of mutual solidarity. Briefly, Turkish-Greek relations entered into a positive turn around the turn of the millennium, especially in terms of the civil society dialogue between the two countries, with the Marmara earthquake and Helsinki process playing a major role.

During this period, a particularly positive trend was evident in the three main indicators of the two countries' economic relations, those of trade, investment, and tourism. Therefore, starting from the early 2000s, economic relations, an issue of "low politics," suddenly blossomed after three decades of dormancy since the 1970s. Between 2000 and 2008, the total volume of trade between Turkey and Greece increased by 312 percent (Koukoudakis, 2015, p.88). The mutual tourism sectors boomed similarly, and foreign direct investment (FDI) from Greece to Turkey saw a dramatic rise (Bank of Greece Statistics, 2021).

Also, the energy sector was of considerable economic interest to both countries. A connection between them was inaugurated, literally, in 2007, by a Turkish-Greek pipeline transporting the first non-Russian supply of natural gas to European markets (Koukoudakis, 2015, p.88). Of paramount importance for European energy security, and with both countries playing the role of energy hub, this project was a clear example of a new positive-sum-game mentality (Grigoriadis, 2011-12, p.125). Along with Russia and Algeria, Turkey was now also a major supplier of natural gas to Greece.

The upswing was not just quantitative. Broadly speaking, Turkish-Greek relations in the post-Helsinki era were significantly Europeanized. In addition to the growing economic interdependence, the process of Europeanization was also facilitated by several developments, such as increasing societal links, a number of confidence-building measures, and a plethora of cultural activities. All these activities, however, failed to prevent or even slow down the deterioration of relations between the two countries at the level of "high politics" that followed. Even in the case of the increased "economic interaction between the two countries," as observed by Dimitris Tsarouhas (2019, p.205), the "reciprocal costs [of] cooperation failure… [were] remarkably low," and incentives that might have generated "political resolution" remained "structurally weak."

Indeed, economic relations between the two countries were not strong enough to check the downward spiral in political relations that was to come. Despite the significant transformation in Turkish-Greek relations generally, many issues, above all, the problems of high politics, such as the Aegean dispute and the Cyprus issue, remained unresolved.

End of Euphoria and Recent Developments

The initial years of the post-Helsinki era saw a certain euphoria in the relationship between the two countries. This started to cool when Turkish-EU accession talks, launched in late 2005, were de facto frozen over the Cyprus dispute, with the EU's suspension in December 2006 of eight accession chapters. In addition to the weakening of Europeanization in Turkish foreign policy more broadly after 2006—as this moved into a "neo-Ottoman" phase (in the Balkans, as well as in Syria and more generally)—the loss of momentum in the development of Turkish-Greek relations was aggravated in Greece by

the austerity measures imposed by the EU following the country's financial collapse.

The eight-year austerity regime in Greece led to a dramatic transformation of the country's political party system; the mainstream center-right and center-left political parties were significantly weakened and populist left-wing and far-right parties—notably the Coalition of the Radical Left (*Sinaspismós Rizospastikís Aristerás*, Syriza) and Golden Dawn (*Chrysi Avgi*)—gained ascendance (Parker & Tsarouhas, 2018). Greek national identity in relation to Europe was similarly reconstructed, with the Greeks viewing European constraints and norms with suspicion and antagonism, even extending to simple rejection. Popular trust in the EU in Greece sank from 58 percent in 2008 to 22 percent in 2017 (Hlepas, 2018, p.13). In short, with Greece preoccupied with its devastating economic problems, Turkish-Greek relations lost urgency and fell from the agenda. Certainly, the weak and shaky semi-nationalist and nationalist coalition governments in Athens between 2011 and 2019 were hardly in a position to strike a historic deal with Turkey (Heraclides, 2019a, p.8).

In addition to its game-changing austerity regime, Greece also had to deal with the Syrian refugee flows precipitated by the Syrian civil war. This worsened after 2015, becoming a "crisis" and causing tensions between Turkey and the EU generally, as well as Greece, which led to the signing of a Turkey-EU agreement in 2016 (European Council, 2016). While the migration deal stemmed the European inflow of refugees entering Greece and the EU through Turkey, relations were not repaired sufficiently to thwart the increasing de-Europeanization in Turkish politics and souring of relations with Brussels and the EU member states, including Greece.

While the problems related to the austerity regime and the refugee crisis distracted Greece from advancing relations with its Aegean neighbor, Turkey was also confronted with its own internal and external challenges. After 2006, when its EU accession talks stalled, Turkey gradually started to orient its foreign policy to the Middle East and North Africa (i.e., the Islamic as opposed to the Western world). After 2011, the government in Ankara sought to eliminate the negative implications of the Syrian conflict along its borders, including what it saw as an existential threat with the rise of a PKK-linked autonomous region in Syria on its southeastern border. Turkey also engaged in a major military action against the PKK, especially

after July 2015. Then, the July 15, 2016 coup attempt was a milestone in Turkish domestic politics and foreign relations alike. Thereafter, the AKP government was to spend much of its energy on cleansing state institutions of the followers of Fethullah Gülen, the alleged mastermind of the coup attempt.

Especially after the 2013 Gezi Park events (nationwide protests) and 2016 coup attempt, religious conservatism combined with a resurgent nationalism led to a new political arrangement in Turkish politics. In parliament, the AKP had to enter into a coalition with the Nationalist Movement Party (*Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi*, MHP), and the word "crisis" started to be mentioned more frequently in characterizing Turkey's foreign policy, including its relations with Greece. The fact that nationalist discourses in both countries were more common after 2012 hindered any efforts at resolving the thorny issues in bilateral relations in a more constructive way (Heraclides, 2019b, p.94). The language of politicians regarding the tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Cyprus issue moved away from reconciliation and became more rigid.

Even in the field of economics, while interactions between the two countries during the 2000s had "benefited from political stability," after 2010, they were "characterized by the rise of high politics and concomitant instability" (Tsarouhas, 2019, p.202). Especially in the post-2008 period, with Greece hit first by the global economic crisis (culminating in the EU austerity program) and rising instability in Turkey (culminating in armed conflict in the Kurdish southeast and the attempted coup), economic relations were negatively impacted. From 2010, the economic crisis in Greece caused the trade volume between the two countries to fluctuate and decrease in some years. From a value of over 5.5 billion dollars in 2014, it decreased to under three billion dollars in 2015 (Tsarouhas, 2019, p.204). Turkish investments in Greece also fell as the government in Athens implemented capital controls in a crisis environment of profound political unrest. Additionally, political and security considerations entailed further securitization in relations, so some of the benefit for the Turkey-Greece relationship accrued through economic exchange was negated.

The economic crisis in Greece, influx of Syrian refugees, and political fluctuations in Turkey also negatively affected civil society collaborations, with the number of collaborations and different actors

involved decreasing significantly (Karakatsanis, 2019, p.250). The souring of Turkish-EU relations meant that the EU's normative impact on Turkey also declined, and the EU was used less for mobilization by civil society groups (Boşnak, 2016).

The economic and political developments in both Turkey and Greece since the 2010s caused their civil societies to turn to their internal problems and put the development of mutual relations into the background (Karakatsanis, 2019, p.239). After the coup attempt of July 15, 2016, such cooperation at the civil society level that was undertaken evolved in a different direction, towards Greek solidarity with the embattled liberal-left in Turkey. Greek civil society supported dismissed academics, Turkish asylum seekers fleeing to Greece, and activists on trial or imprisoned in Turkey (Karakatsanis, 2019, p.239). In this context, problems around the attempted coup in Turkey became a major block, as can be seen from the following remarks: "For instance, in response to the Greek Council of State's decision to release and/or to provide shelter to the fugitives," Turkey characterized Greece as "a country protecting and sheltering coup plotters" (Türkeş-Kılıç, 2019, p.185).

The political atmosphere was also made fraught by the question of migrants and refugees. With more than three million Syrians in the country, Erdoğan, who is now the president complained about the EU's failure to meet its responsibilities under the EU-Turkey Readmission Agreement signed in March 2016, and after several times threatening to open its borders for people to cross into Europe, in February 2020, finally decided to do so (when dealing with the Idlib refugee crisis). As a result, thousands of refugees massed at the border, wanting to cross into Greece. Seeking full European support, Athens responded with harsh measures to prevent any influx, while Turkey tried to prevent the refuge pushbacks. Greek Premier Kyriakos Mitsotakis stated that "Turkey has become an official trafficker of migrants to the European Union… (This is) an asymmetric threat and illegal invasion of thousands of people that threatens our territory" (Stevis-Gridneff, 2020). Both sides deployed security forces to strengthen their borders, which only aggravated the prevailing tension in Turkish-Greek relations.

The tension was also exacerbated following the (re)conversion of Hagia Sophia to a mosque in July 2020. Hagia Sophia had been the biggest cathedral of Christendom for 900 years and was the religious center of the Eastern Roman (then Byzantine) Empire before the 1453

conquest of Istanbul by the Ottomans, who converted it into a mosque. With the Turkish Republic, it was designated a museum (in 1935) and placed on the UN World Heritage List. Its Islamification received harsh criticism from the Greek side, which, in turn, provoked a sharp Turkish response. While the Turkish Foreign Ministry spokesman accused Greece's reaction to Hagia Sophia being opened to prayers as enmity towards Islam and Turkey, the Greek Foreign Ministry responded by accusing Turkey of fanatic religious and nationalist ramblings (Butler, 2020).

It was in this context of ongoing and developing tension that Erdoğan had made a radical move to amend the Lausanne Treaty of 1920, which laid the foundations of modern Turkey and determined its borders with Greece, including with regard to the Aegean islands (Sofuoğlu, 2018). Announcing his intention during a visit to Greece in December 2017, the Turkish leader declared that a revision was needed in the face of recent developments, in response to which the Greek president declared the treaty to be non-negotiable.

Can the Treaty of Lausanne be amended? The future of Turkish-Greek relations may be shaped by this question. Clearly, Turkish-Greek foreign policy poses a challenge for both sides—not only to avoid conflict and scale down tensions, but also to be ready to compromise in the name of a long-lasting solution to a diverse set of problems. These concrete problem areas are explored next.

CONCRETE PROBLEM AREAS

In the Turkish-Greek relationship, the Cyprus, Aegean Sea, and Eastern Mediterranean issues emerge as particularly intractable, they are major concrete problem areas. As long as they remain such, however, there is always the risk that any escalation of a crisis may turn into a hot conflict, although war has thus far been avoided. This is a situation of fragile stability, which characterizes the nature of Turkish-Greek relations. The problematic status of these issues is partly a result of the differing perspectives of the two nations, as will be outlined below.

A Multilateral, Historical Issue: The Cyprus Problem

The Cyprus issue has been one of the most important reasons for the inherent political tension between Turkey and Greece. Involving

international law and other powers—Britain, in particular—it has a long history and multilateral dimensions. Turkey's European relations were already fundamentally affected by it with the accession of Greece to the European Community in 1981 and have been exacerbated by developments since, notwithstanding attempts to broker a deal.

Prior to Turkey's foundation in 1923, there was British imperial rule on the island, which was ratified in the Lausanne peace treaty. During the period leading to independence and the establishment of the Republic of Cyprus in 1960, the Greeks there had organized around the movement named "Union" (*Enosis*), aiming to unite the island with Greece, while the Turks insisted on the partition of the island (Tzimitras & Hatay, 2016). During this period, many civilians from both sides had to relocate. Conflicts broke out and spread, and attempts were made for peace, leading to the Zurich and London agreements in 1959. The Republic was established through a treaty signed by the UK, Greece, and Turkey, determining the basic principles of its international status and constitution (Duran, 2018, p.120). The three countries signed the treaty as the guarantor states, together with representatives of the Turkish and Greek communities on the island.[1] Thus, a bi-communal republic was established under the joint sovereignty of the island's Greeks and Turks, and the ideals of both Enosis and partition were forgone (Duran, 2018, p.122).

However, various incidents—including the 1963 Bloody Christmas attacks,[2] subsequent violence, and the overthrow of the Greek Cypriot leader, Archbishop and President Makarios, as a result of a Greek junta-organized coup in July 1974—prompted Turkey to intervene militarily, based on its authority as a guarantor. The junta in Athens fell as a result, but peace talks in Geneva were interrupted by Turkey's second and decisive military operation in August when the island was de facto divided into two. A population exchange ensued, and there was also migration to the northern part from Turkey. The independence of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) was declared in 1983, but it was only recognized by Turkey. Overall, the Turkish military intervention in Cyprus in 1974 constituted a turning point in the relations between the two countries—and with Europe, where the second Turkish intervention was deemed an invasion and its military on the island now regarded an occupying force (per UN resolutions).

1 For the full treaty and memorandum texts, see www.mfa.gov.tr/kibris.tr.mfa (23.11.2020).

2 Turkish Cypriot houses were attacked and many people killed on Christmas Eve, 1963.

In this context, the date 1990 is remarkable as the year when what Turkey refers to as "the Greek Cypriot Administration of Southern Cyprus" but representing the entire island applied for full membership of what was then the European Economic Community (EEC). Turkey objected, stating that, according to Article 1 of the Treaty of Guarantee, since there was not a government representing the whole of the island, it could not join any international organization. However, the Greek Cypriot Administration was accepted as the only sovereign state on the island by the EU, but the TRNC ignored this recognition. Thus, the Republic of Cyprus was accepted for membership—to the European Community (EC)—on May 1, 2004.

With the entry of (Greek) Cyprus into the European body in 2004, the number of parties to the Cyprus problem was increased and the problem made more complex. For example, the EU requires a solution to the Cyprus problem as a precondition for Turkey's membership. In the process of Turkey's EU accession process, a comprehensive solution plan was prepared by the UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan. Supported by the EU, a referendum was held on April 24, 2004. Nearly two-thirds of voters in the Turkish north accepted the plan, but three-quarters of those in the Greek south rejected it (Duran, 2018, p.124). Another negotiation process was initiated in 2008, but again without any conclusive result. Following lengthy negotiations, talks held in Switzerland in June and July 2017 also failed.[3]

Given the veto power of both Greece and (Southern) Cyprus in the EU, solving the Cyprus question became a prerequisite for Turkey to continue its membership negotiations. The major issue of contention here results from the protocol 2005/672/EC annexed to the Ankara Agreement, which extends Turkey's customs union with the EU to all member states, in relation to which Ankara subsequently made a unilateral declaration stating that the Republic of Cyprus established in 1960 is not included among these countries.[4] As its rationale for this, Turkey claimed that the Republic of Cyprus had lost some of its qualifications that were present at the time of its establishment. The EU, on the other hand, stated that all member states are part of the negotiation process and that Turkey should take the Republic of Cyprus into account (Günar, 2020, p.108).

[3] The Greek Cypriot maritime delimitation agreements in the Eastern Mediterranean with Egypt, Lebanon, and Israel representing the entire island were influential in this failure (see below).

[4] For the text of the treaty, see www.ab.gov.tr/files/AB_Iliskileri/Tur_En_Realitons/protokol_2005.pdf (05.01.2021).

The failure of the Annan plan in 2004 and developments thereafter created a veritable disappointment for the Turkish side, both on the mainland and on the island. This was only aggravated in the following period, when, in 2017, (Southern) Cyprus left the table at the Conference on Cyprus in Crans Montana, Switzerland, and refused to accept a joint committee with the Turkish Cypriots on hydrocarbons. In this context, advocacy of a "two-state solution" was developed in the Turkish and TRNC Cyprus policy.

The entry of the Greek Cypriot side to the EU in 2004 on behalf of Cyprus is a development that may be said to have increased political inequality. The decline in Turkey-EU relations since 2016 and Turkey's growing isolation have been revealed in the Eastern Mediterranean, which has thus provided an enlarged policy space for the Greek Cypriot side and further increased the political inequality. Notwithstanding the Cyprus problem, the most pervasive difficulties in Turkish-Greek relations hampering any prospect for an enduring normalization have been and remain the Aegean Sea disputes.

An Ongoing Problem Area: Aegean Sea Issues

The Aegean Sea is the setting for many issues that emerge as concrete problems between Turkey and Greece. In addition to disputes over the sovereignty of certain islets, there are conflicting claims with regard to the delimitation of the continental shelf and territorial waters, the extent of Greek national airspace, and the demilitarization and disarmament of the eastern Aegean islands.

The geographical concept of the continental shelf was first defined in the 1958 Geneva Convention, which thus, introduced it into international law. Thereafter, in the 1960s, Greece commenced oil exploration in the Aegean Sea. In response, Turkey gave a license to the Turkish Petroleum Corporation (*Türkiye Petrolleri Anonim Ortaklığı*, TPAO) to explore for oil in the Eastern Aegean (Avar & Lin, 2019, p.57). However, the Greek and Turkish areas of geophysical research overlapped in some places, and problems related to the continental shelf areas of the two countries and their territories started to emerge. Claiming per the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea that every island has a continental shelf area, Greece stated that its research and drilling activities complied with international law (Avar & Lin, 2019, p.60). Turkey, meanwhile, emphasized that it was not a party to the Convention and declared itself not legally bound by it. Greece

objected on the grounds that even though Turkey was not a party, the Convention still applied as a source of customary international law.

Actually, pursuant to the Convention, Greece argues that the delimitation of sea areas concerning the continental shelf should be made according to the middle line principle for states whose coasts are facing each other. In this view, the middle line to be drawn between the Greek islands and Turkish territory should then be taken as a basis for determining the continental shelf of Turkey and Greece. What Greece aims at here is to preserve the political unity between the Greek islands and the Greek mainland. Turkey, on the other hand, argues that if two neighboring countries or countries with opposite coasts come into conflict over the borderline, the continental shelf should be determined according to the principles of equity and by considering all relevant features and unique characteristics of the region. In this vein, Turkey states that many of the Greek islands in the Aegean Sea are very close to the Turkish coast—as little as three miles away—and that recognizing continental shelf areas as belonging to these islands would be unfair, almost wholly preventing the Turkish mainland from assuming its natural continental shelf areas (Avar & Lin, 2019, p.57).

Briefly, according to the Greeks, because of the numerous Greek islands, most of the Aegean continental shelf belongs to them; Turkey responds by arguing that much of the Aegean continental shelf is geologically an extension of the Anatolian mainland and should be delimited on an equitable basis. The delimitation of the continental shelf is not the only problem between Turkey and Greece regarding the Aegean Sea.

Another problem involves the extent of the territorial sea. In 1936, Greece extended its territorial seas from three to six miles, and when the 1982 Convention became law in 1994, Greece declared an augmentation of its territorial seas in the Aegean to twelve miles. According to Greece, a coastal state is free to extend its territorial waters to twelve miles without any reservations, including those that would result from the special conditions of the region—such as in the Aegean.

For Turkey, this claim is regarded as a *casus belli* since it would mean being restricted to a "Greek lake" in the Aegean. Reducing the amount of open sea in the Aegean from 51 percent to 19 percent, Greece's share of the Aegean sovereign waters would increase from the current

40 percent to 70 percent whilst Turkey's share would be reduced to less than 10 percent (Republic of Turkey, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, n.d.). In this context, Turkey argues that the twelve-mile limit, declared unilaterally by states, cannot be applied in an absolute way and needs to be applied according to certain principles of international law. A Greek implementation of the limit would contravene the international law principle of equity. Furthermore, Turkey states that because it is a persistent objector, the Convention cannot be applied to it.

The issue of territorial waters is doubly important since it also determines airspace. With Greece declaring its territorial waters at twelve miles, it augmented its airspace to ten miles, of which Turkey disregards the area beyond the first six miles. Therefore, dog fights between Turkish and Greek planes—although the Turkish planes were not armed with missiles—have occurred in the four-mile disputed airspace. The issue of flight information regions (FIRs) also impedes relations in this context, as is clear from the following:

> The problem still persists between the two countries in [the] sense that Turkey demands modification of the Aegean FIR responsibilities on the grounds of equity and national security, and Greece, while refusing… this demand, insists that Turkish state aircraft… file flight plans with Athens. (Aydın, 1997, p.119).

Further to these issues, Turkey has a security concern due to the continuing Greek militarization of its islands in the Aegean since 1974, to which it responded by stationing an army of the Aegean. The East Aegean Islands were de-armed under several international treaties, including the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne and the 1947 Treaty of Paris, but Greece has been arming them since the 1960s. While accepting the jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice (ICJ), Athens, citing its national security interests, has raised some reservations concerning matters arising from military measures and sought to prevent the issue from going to the Court.

Finally, the legal status of many islets in the Aegean Sea grey zones, which became a public issue with the Imia/Kardak crisis (as noted, above), remains a tricky problem. According to Turkey, the problem regarding the legal status of these geographical formations is essentially a conflict regarding the interpretation of agreements. In fact, Turkey does not claim any rights on the islands, islets, or such

formations that have been expressly ceded to Greece by internationally valid instruments. However, there are many islets and geographical formations in the Aegean Sea whose sovereignty was not given to Greece. Some of these are very close to Turkey's coast, making the issue another one of the obstacles to the determination of maritime borders between the two countries.

In facing all these issues, Turkey and Greece have not even been able to agree on a methodology to adopt for the resolution of conflicts. For Greece, its right to a twelve-mile territorial sea is non-negotiable, so the only question is the continental shelf and, with the revised Greek position since 1996, the sovereignty of Imia/Kardak. As Greece had previously long insisted on submitting disputed issues to the ICJ on a "one problem-one solution" basis, the turning point in its Turkish relations on this matter came in 2002, when Greece accepted direct negotiations to settle it. For its part, Turkey held that all interrelated issues should be addressed as a whole and settled at the same time through direct negotiations. During the first decade of the 2000s, precisely the period of Europeanization, however, Ankara also followed the "EU (conditionality) and accepted the decision to [take] the Aegean dispute to the ICJ if the issue could not be settled through bilateral negotiations." (Kalkan, 2020, pp.170-171). Even during the Europeanization of Turkish foreign policy, concrete solutions to the disputes though were not formulated.

Overall, the Europeanization of Turkish foreign policy could have guided the management of the disputed issues towards at least preventing the possibilities of a crisis situation arising (Yavas, 2013), but the essence of those issues—namely, those concerning the continental shelf, the territorial waters and sovereign airspace, and the islets and geographical formations—were precisely the issues of high politics that went unaddressed. Having first emerged in 1974, they came to the surface again in the post-2006 period with the declining credibility of the EU for Turkey and have been increasingly prominent through and since the 2010s. As EU-Turkey relations declined, dialogue and engagement-oriented foreign policies in relation to the Aegean have increasingly given way to hardline, security-oriented approaches (Kalkan, 2020, p.168). Thus, the exploratory contacts between the two countries that started in 2002 were ended in 2016 without making much progress and restarted in January 2021 with little prospect of hope, particularly with the recent emergence of the Eastern Mediterranean as a major conflict area.

A New Conflict Area: The Eastern Mediterranean

Since the discovery of natural gas reserves in the Eastern Mediterranean in the early 2000s, there have been ongoing disagreements about maritime jurisdiction areas among the coastal states there, including between Turkey and Greece. In this context, the relevant disagreement is over countries' continental shelves and exclusive economic zones (EEZs). Accordingly, the two points of conflict between Turkey and Greece are first, whether (Southern) Cyprus will have the same EEZ as Turkey, and second, whether Greek islands, such as Rhodes, Crete, and Meis, will have an EEZ.

For Turkey, there is no doubt that the island of Cyprus should have an EEZ. However, the coastal lengths of Turkey and Cyprus are very different, and their maritime jurisdiction areas, such as the maritime continental shelves and the EEZs, are close to one another (Acer, 2019, p.39). In a similar dispute between Malta and Libya, the ICJ applied the principle of proportionality in rejecting the claim that, based on the sovereign equality of states, Malta should have equal maritime jurisdiction with Libya (i.e., regardless of their coastal lengths). Although such a distinction is not made in the 1982 Convention, judicial decisions appear to support Turkey's position, which adopts the proportionality principle, against that of Greece, which seeks to determine the maritime jurisdiction area of the Greek Cypriot Administration according to the principle of equality.

This problem was aggravated in 2004 when, in addition to adopting the principle of equality, Greece and the Greek Cypriot side declared an EEZ on behalf of the Republic of Cyprus as the sole sovereign of the island of Cyprus and then signed EEZ delimitation agreements with Egypt, Lebanon, and Israel (in 2003, 2007, and 2010, respectively) (Yaycı, 2020, p.34). (Southern) Cyprus then engaged in drilling activities. Turkey rebuffed these, both in word and deed, along with Greek and Greek Cypriot claims in the Eastern Mediterranean.

As to whether the islands under its sovereignty have a continental shelf and an EEZ, Greece is of the opinion that the 1982 Convention gives the islands the right to determine their territorial waters, adjacent area, continental shelf, and EEZ and that states that are not a party to the Convention (referring to Turkey) should also recognize this, per international custom (Arıdemir & Allı, 2019, p.194). Article 121 of the 1982 Convention states that islands—other than rocks that are not

suitable for human habitation or do not have an economic life of their own—are entitled to an EEZ and continental shelf. Against this, the Turkish side proposes the principles of the superiority of geography and equitable settlement (Acer, 2019, p.11). Following the principle of the superiority of geography, the mainland should play a dominant role in determining maritime jurisdiction areas. This principle is important to Turkey since its access to the open seas would be closed if these islands were to have a continental shelf and EEZ.

In this context, the Turkish side also differs in its interpretation of Article 121 of the Convention. For Ankara, when it comes to continental shelf and EEZ claims, Article 121 should be only interpreted to include mainland islands and island states, such as the UK—and the two halves of Cyprus. Thus, the Greek islands are not within the scope of Article 121, and the Greek islands can only have territorial seas. This argument is supported by the ICJ decision in the case of the Channel Islands between England and France, in which only the right of territorial sea was granted to the English islands lying very close to the coast of France (Arıdemir & Allı, 2019, p.195).

Turkey aimed to strengthen its position through the October 2019 signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on the Limitation of Maritime Jurisdiction in the Mediterranean with Libya (signed by the internationally legitimate Libyan Government of National Accord). This agreement was founded on Turkey's two critical theses; only six miles of territorial waters and no EEZ or continental shelf were recognized for the Greek islands, while the continental shelf and the EEZ of the Greek Cypriot Administration were recognized on the principle of proportionality. With this agreement, Turkey's arguments were accepted by another coastal country in the eastern Mediterranean region (Acer, 2019, p.13).

Greece objected to this agreement and did not recognize it. In addition to its previous arguments, Greece noted that although the Libyan Government of National Accord signed this agreement, the Libyan House of Representatives had not ratified it (which was due to Libya's unstable political situation) (Acer, 2019, p.17). Meanwhile, in August 2020, Greece signed an agreement with Egypt to delimit an EEZ according to the Greek understanding, which overlapped the EEZ established by the Turkey–Libya MoU.

Turkey states that the agreements with other states made by the Greek Cypriot Administration as the Republic of Cyprus are actually null and

void for the following three main reasons: it does not recognize the Republic of Cyprus, the Greek Cypriots do not represent the Turkish population living on the island, and the exploration activities carried out unilaterally by the Greek Cypriot Administration of Southern Cyprus disrupted the reconciliation and reunification process on the island. Turkey holds that the unilateral activities of (Southern) Cyprus in the Eastern Mediterranean should be suspended until the Cyprus problem is resolved (Karbuz, 2018, p.249).

CONCLUSION

This article has approached the question of how the nature of Turkish-Greek relations should be characterized by reviewing the evolution of the relationship and the concrete problem areas between the two countries. The literature to date lacks a definition of the Turkish-Greek relationship, therefore the primary contribution of this article is to provide a historical and material demonstration of fleeting periods of friendship amid the more enduring, underlying tension and areas of disagreement that episodically break out in heated dispute. It is worth pointing out, however that the protracted dispute has so far not heated up to the point of direct and open conflict, which would be too costly. As a result, the problems appear to be frozen—the parties to the dispute experience recurring fluctuations in their relationship with each other—a relationship which can thus, be defined as a fragile stability. Concerning the longer-term aim to envision possible paths for the future, it is argued in this paper that this nature of Turkish-Greek relations characterized as a fragile stability that needs to be addressed.

In this regard, the following three points offer some clues about the overall Turkey-Greece relationship. First, each nation presents its own righteousness through the argument of the other's unjust claims. In this dynamic, the media also becomes a geopolitical actor, forming public opinion and affecting governance. Second, there is a tendency in both Turkey and Greece to see the other's loss as their own gain in a zero-sum game of "realism." In the problem areas of Cyprus, the Aegean Sea, and Eastern Mediterranean, the two states take the uncompromising position they have the absolute sovereign rights of a territorial state to defend itself, adhering to a principle that translate to the need to strengthen its hard power. In fact, each side clashes with the other over its representation of sovereignty.

Third, in order to understand the Turkish-Greek relationship, one should refer to nationalism as an ideology in order to identify the deeper problem. In this sense, both nations fought for and won their independence against the other, Greece against the Ottoman Empire early in the nineteenth century, and Turkey, created out of this Empire, against Greece early in the twentieth century. This may also give clues about why rapprochements between the two countries have been rather short-lived. For example, with the changing domestic and international circumstances and the predominance of hard-power issues over the low politics of economic and civil society relations in the post-Helsinki period, relations had started to deteriorate as early as 2006.

In this respect, since the possibility of war is never off the table, albeit not foreseen, the course of bilateral relations will probably continue to follow a path of conflict and crisis rather than cooperation. While the frozen nature of problems between the two countries may give one a certain illusion of stability, it is on the contrary, a reality constantly threatened by crisis. The fact that the global powers remain rather as parties to the problem in their struggle for the distribution of resources and dominance in the areas of regional influence that will further deepen the atmosphere of conflict. There is continual tension and a constant possibility of one side or the other (Turkey or Greece) resorting to force, but the price of war would be too high. The problems are profound and can thus, more easily go unresolved until they become enkindled, when a crisis situation "suddenly" emerges.

Expectations for the future depend on both international as well as domestic developments, but the major actors in this relationship are Turkey and Greece themselves. The extent to which domestic variables are concerned in the bilateral relations—factors such as changes in leadership, shifts in nationalism, and developments in the economic trajectories of the two states—seems to constitute a major element determining the future of relations. Also, the role to be played by the EU, not as a party in overall Turkish-Greek relations but as a credible actor for mediation, may make a valuable contribution within the larger context of the Cyprus, Aegean Sea, and Eastern Mediterranean issues. Most importantly, Europeanization, in the sense of both Turkey and Greece complying with the principles of democracy and human rights, can pave the way for a new rapprochement between the two countries. Unfortunately, however, these avenues for a positive evolution of Turkish-Greek relations remain weak possibilities given

the above observations and the concrete nature of the problems between the two countries.

To conclude, therefore, it might be stated that taking into consideration how national interest defined in terms of power guides their actions, Turkey and Greece are not only linked by the conflict areas of reciprocal relations, but also seem to be a manifestation of all the grand themes of international relations. These include the Hobbesian perspective that prioritizes power, the short-term, zero-sum logic of realism, the masculine perspective that securitizes the outside of the state as the protector of the nation inside, and the rhetoric of nationalism as an ideology, marginalizing the "other" through historical narratives. From this perspective, the opposite shores of the Aegean appear to define a candidate laboratory for the displacement of the mainstream approaches of international relations. For the future evolution of a positive, peaceful, life-enhancing relationship between the two neighbors, a new rationality based on an understanding of long-term, mutual interests is what the politicians, media, and opinion leaders should invest in, including important third parties, such as the EU and US.

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