CACOPHONY IN THE AEGEAN; CONTEMPORARY TURKISH-GREEK RELATIONS*

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Introduction

On 25 December 1995, a Turkish coaster named *Figen Akat* run aground on one of the hitherto unnoticed rocks in the Aegean, 3.8 nautical miles off the Turkish coast. Later that day, the carrier, after refusing the rescue offer from a nearby Greek coast-guard, was able to float again and back to its harbour towards evening without any further incident and much damage. At the time, nobody could foresee that this pure coincidence would start a series of events that brought two allies to the edge of war. In fact, for several weeks, there was no crisis and it seemed that only a handful of people, who exchanged diplomatic notes, did notice the incident. However, everything changed nearly a month later on 20 January 1996, when the incident was leaked to the Greek periodical *Granma*, only a day after Mr. Costas Simitis was named to form the new Greek government. Immediately, a media campaign was launched by the Greek press with nationalistic overtones, apparently to test Simitis' fortitude against Turkey.

Then a local priest from the island of Kalimnos, a Greek island 5.5 nautical miles away from the rocks, took upon himself to come to the rocks on 26 January with a local TV crew and raise the Greek flag where no flag

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ever seen before. Although the official Turkish reaction was moderate, some Turkish journalists, concerned primarily with the circulation of their paper, hoisted the Turkish flag over the rocks next day. This flag hoisting competition by individuals could have been considered innocent, had not the Greek government, under constant media pressure, taken a decision to send Greek navy to the rocks to plant and protect the Greek flag. This was considered as 'an act of aggression and armed hostility against Turkish sovereignty' by the Turkish government, which immediately called an emergency meeting of the National Security Council. There were talks of forcing Greek troops from the rocks by force if necessary.[1] However, an ingenious idea put forward the then Undersecretary of Turkish Foreign Ministry, ambassador Onur Öymen, saved the day. Accordingly, Turkish marines landed and hoisted Turkish flag on the rock next to the one that Greek troops already occupied. This gave the US special envoy Richard Holbroke just enough time to put pressure on both governments, and Turkish and Greek soldiers were called back without lost of face and any further incident.[2]

This was the latest occasion when Greece and Turkey nearly went to war with each other. Judging by their size, the Kardak/Imia Rocks do not seem like much to fight over. But there were serious issues at stake and the incident might well have escalated to full scale war between two allies. Though whole affair took less than five days to be played out, the nature of the crisis over couple of barren rocks, the speed by which it escalated, and the manner in which it was resolved, nevertheless, underscored the delicate state of relations between the two countries in the Aegean.

Although Turkey and Greece are members of NATO since 1952 and thus, in addition to being neighbours, have been allies for almost 46 years now, their neighbourhood has been in anything but harmony despite the fact that they have not fought with each other since 1920s. On the contrary, the discord has grown deeper and wider over time on several vital issues, which have from time to time brought the two countries to the brink of war.

The majority of long-standing disagreements between them could have been overcome years ago had the leadership in both countries acted responsible by abandoning the policy of making use of those disagreements in domestic power struggles, and had they, with a nationalistic myopia, not

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[1]The tension reached its highest point when Greek premier Simitis vowed to 'never lower the flag' while the then Turkish premier Çiller promised in a press conference that '...that flag shall come down, those soldiers shall go'. **Milliyet**, 30 January 1996.

[2]Only casualties of the incident were three Greek chopper pilots who lost control of their vehicle while flying over the Rocks and crashed to the sea. **Turkish Daily News**, 8 February 1996.

turned a blind eye to the other's needs and fears. However, as this has not been the case, we are at present end up with a fearful state of uneasiness in relations at the brink of war and with populations in each side thoroughly 'educated' to distrust each other at every level. Hence, the basic assertion of this chapter is that the existing disagreements and problems between two states cannot be solved easily and summarily. Therefore, instead of running after magical formulas for rapid reconciliation, trying to create a general understanding and trusting environment between the two states and more importantly between peoples would have much better chances, over the long run, where all the mediating efforts of outsiders have failed.

Living history

Among the obstacles that prevents not only solving but even the discussion of the existing problems, is the distrust between two nations created by their 'living history'. In both Greece and Turkey, 'history is not past; indeed, the past continues to live in the present'.[3]

This anomaly stems from the fact that both Turkey and Greece have obtained their national identities by fighting against, and interacting with, each other. Therefore, it would not be possible, for example, to understand the modern Greek history without taking the 'Turkish factor' into account. Almost every corner of the modern day Greece had been under Turkish rule for about four hundred years, and modern Greece born out of struggle against the Ottoman Empire. The popular Turkish image of Greek 'Independence War' is a rebellion, instigated and supported by the Great Powers of the 19th century, who 'used' the Greeks for their own purposes to disintegrate the Ottoman Empire. In a similar fashion, modern Turkey earned its nation-state status only after defeating Greek occupation forces in Western Anatolia following the First World War. For the Greeks, this struggle, which is revered as the 'War of National Liberation' by the Turks, still remembered as 'Asia Minor catastrophe'.[4]

The fact that these two states earned their national identities by fighting with each other has undoubtedly affected their subsequent relations. It also reinforced identity crises of both peoples. Both Turkey and Greece - may be more so Turkey now- have felt insecure about their situation between East and West. Though 'they share a common heritage', i.e., Ottoman-Levantine, neither Greece nor Turkey, for different reasons, wishes to

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[3] Ş. S. Gürel, **Tarihsel Boyut İçinde Türk-Yunan İlişkileri, 1821-1993** (Turkish-Greek Relations in Historical Context, 1821-1993). Ankara: Ümit, 1993, p. 10.

[4] See for example, P. K. Jensen, 'The Greco-Turkish War, 1920-1922', **International Journal of Middle East Studies**, Vol. 10 (4), 1979, pp. 553-565.

acknowledge it. This creates an important problem as 'neither state is at peace with itself, because, to deny one's own past which lives on in the present, is to deny one's own very identity'.[5] In order to compensate for this denied common heritage, both nations has to remember their national struggles for independence unceasingly and cling to the best delineated parts of their identities, that is their nation-stateness, defined in terms of opposition to the 'other'. In this way, they are not only pushing a common heritage into a forgotten past, but also create a living part of history by advancing confrontation and conflict to the forefront.[6] This, then, only helps to reinforce and widen mutual mistrust. Therefore, as argued by Clogg,

> ...even if a rapprochement between two governments is achieved, it would be a much more difficult and arduous process to overcome the mistrust between two peoples, mutual stereotypes and fears that are fundamental for existing confrontation. Until a fundamental change in mutual (mis)perceptions has achieved, we will continue to see a mutual proclivity towards suspicion and crisis in the relations between two states.[7]

As it is often the case between long-suffering neighbours, locked in chronicled enmities, the history of relationship between Greece and Turkey litters with a long list of past failures and deceptions. However, the symbolic strength of this history in defining current and future relations is often misunderstood by outsiders, who usually trivialise the nature of the 'love-hate' relationship between the two countries. This then leads to leaving these two countries alone, an act that helps protraction of the disputes and inability to solve them. Because, 'although both sides stress their willingness to engage in dialogue to resolve outstanding grievances', the danger is that, in the absence of an external threat or 'encouragement' to move closer, 'neither lacks examples to cite of the other's perceived intransigence or paranoia'.[8]

Various surveys as well as political statements have shown that threat perceptions in both sides of the Aegean will not be symmetric in the foreseeable future.[9] Given the existing disparity between two countries'

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[5]A. J. R. Groom, 'Cyprus, Greece and Turkey: A Treadmill for Diplomacy', in T. A. Koumoulides (ed.), **Cyprus in Transition, 1960-1985**. London: Trigraph, 1986, p. 152.

[6]Gürel, **op. cit.**, p. 11.

[7]R. Clogg, 'The Troubled Alliance: Greece and Turkey', in R. Clogg (ed.), **Greece in the 1980s**. New York: St Martin's, 1980, p. 141.

[8]C. Spencer, **Turkey Between Europe and Asia**, Wilton Park Paper. London: HMSO, 1993, p. 17.

[9]'90% of the Greeks believe that Turkey threatens Greece'. See P. E. Dimitras, 'Greece: A New Danger', **Foreign Policy**, Spring 1985, p. 137. According to a survey conducted in 1986 in Greece, 63% of those answered stated that

history, resources and population, the fact that most of the Greeks consider Turkey as a 'threat'; and that in turn, most of the Turks do not attribute priority to 'Greek threat' is befitting to reason. However, distrust that has been created by the 'living history' is a sense that is shared and continually reinforced in both sides of the Aegean. Therefore, when dealing with Greek-Turkish relations, it is necessary first to take into account the lack of faith in each other's reliability. In order to overcome such an overwhelmingly negative psychology, both sides have to be resolute to sustain a long-term commitment towards non-political, non-committal confidence building measures. Such a determined effort has not been shown so far by either side. Besides, there remains the fact that even such an effort might not be enough by itself to ensure a real harmony, as the past record of ethnic conflicts all over the world has shown that temporary measures 'do not provide much hope for the eradication of wholesome memories of real or imagined past mistakes. Also, it is impossible to reduce the existing Greek-Turkish confrontation to mutual misunderstandings'.[10] Therefore, only a sustained long term effort and increased cooperation could heal the wounds of a living history and put it into its proper place, that is to the past.

Exception that proves the rule

Cooperation is very easy and tempting to advocate, but difficult to realise in Turkish-Greek relations. As even a rudimentary analysis of past record could easily demonstrate that the dominant trend in Greek-Turkish relations is conflict and competition, and that cooperation is the exception.

There have been two cooperative periods between Greece and Turkey in modern times: 1930s and the first half of 1950s. During the first period, there was a common threat from Italy's *Mare Nostrum* policy and encouragement from England to cooperate against it, and the two countries were engaged in friendly relations culminated in the establishment of Balkan Entente in 1934. During the second, there was Soviet threat and American encouragement. Judging form these examples, we may conclude that Turkey and Greece, as a rule, could improve their harmony only when there is a common threat and, at the same time, are encouraged to cooperate against this threat by an outside power that have a leverage over them.[11]

Accordingly, during the Cold War, both Greece and Turkey were able to cooperate under the NATO banner in putting away their disagreements and, in an effort to prove their fidelity to the Alliance, often 'subordinated

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they do not trust to Turks. See J. Catsiapis, 'L'attitude de la Grece face a le demande d'adhesion de la Turquie aux Communautes Europeannes', **CEMOTI**, No. 8, 1989, p. 116, cited in Gürel, **op. cit.**, p. 12.

[10] Clogg, **op. cit.**, p. 143.

[11] Gürel, **op. cit.**, p. 13.

their own national interests to the dictates of alliance cohesion and the need for collective action'. In the 1960s and the 1970s, however, 'as the security consensus that had characterised the early post-war period began to erode', most of the old problems and tensions, coupled with new ones, reemerged, 'complicating relations with the US and NATO'.[12] What initially tipped off the disagreements between the two states was the developments related to the 1963-64 Cyprus crisis and, over the next decade, relations were exacerbated by a number of other events, ranging from continental shelf to the treatment of national minorities.

Since then the West has become a reference point in relations between the two states. Both sides have shown a persistence in trying to explain their bilateral problems and complain about each other to the West, especially to the US. They have also quite consistently took positions that, instead of reflecting their strict national interests, they thought would be favoured by the West. In this respect, Greece has been particularly attentive since it considered NATO membership as an insurance against Turkey, and tried to use its influence to curtail Turkey's importance for the Alliance.[13] Moreover, after obtaining its EU membership on 1981, Greece had utilised all the assistance that the democratic European institutions could provide against Turkey which was vulnerable at the time because of the military rule it had to endure.

On the other hand, one of the important consequences of accepting the West as a reference point in bilateral relations has been that both countries have attempted to utilise their bilateral disputes and confrontations in order to solidify their place within the Western state system. In the early 1980s, for example, Greek Premier Andreas Papandreou, by exaggerating the threat perception that Greece was receiving from Turkey, tried to obtain a better place in the Western world for his country. His Turkish counterpart, Turgut Özal, on the other hand, tried to reach the same point from an opposite way. He affected a contemptuous attitude acting as if the existing problems between the two countries amount nothing, thereby, while minimising their importance, tried to create a favourable image in the Western world both for himself and for Turkey. In short, external factors, especially the Western patronage and influence, over the Turkish-Greek relations and on the decision-making processes of both countries' foreign and domestic policies are apparent.

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[12] F. S. Larrabee, 'The Southern Periphery; Greece and Turkey', in P. S. Shoup (ed.), **Problems of Balkan Security; Southeastern Europe in the 1990s**. Washington: Wilson Center, 1990, p. 175.

[13] For Greece's NATO policies see Van Coufoudakis, 'Greek-Turkish Relations, 1973-1983: The View From Athens', **International Security**, Vol. 9 (4), Spring 1985, p. 212.

Therefore, a short analysis of Western connection of Greek-Turkish duo will be offered below in addition to a summary explanation of bilateral disputes and Turkish views on them. Finally, some projection will be offered as to provide solution to these problems.

1. Bilateral issues

Since 1974, Greek-Turkish relations have been handicapped mainly by two set of issues: Cyprus and the Aegean. Although, politically and legally, they are quite separate issues, there is 'an obvious psychological linkage between them in the sense that a resolution of one would have an important psychological impact on the resolution of the other',[14] because it is felt that a weakening of one's position in one of the areas would have an effect in the other. Of the two, the dispute over the Aegean is more important because, unlike the Cyprus issue, it touches more directly on vital national interests concerning territorial sovereignty and security for both countries.[15]

Then, there is other thorny issues between the two countries such as the treatment of Greek population within Turkey and of Turkish minority within Greek borders, Greek blockage of Turkish membership to the EU, and numerous other disagreements within NATO. Most of these issues are immensely complex, intertwined with each other, and hotly disputed. But, as much have been written in the description of the issues involved and in the presentation of perspectives, only a simplified sketch of the disputes related with the Aegean and Cyprus will be attempted here with some suggestions how to deal with them.[16]

1.1 Confrontation in the Aegean

The Aegean issue is, in fact, a set of four separate issues. These include: (i) delimitation of the maritime boundaries and continental shelf; (ii) the breadth of territorial waters; (iii) control of the air space beyond the

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[14] Larrabee, **op. cit.**, p. 188.

[15] **Ibid.**, p. 189; A. Braun, **Small State Security in the Balkans**. London: MacMillan, 1983, p. 237.

[16] As the discussion of these issues will be crudely simplified here, for more detailed and detached review see A. Wilson, **The Aegean Dispute**, Adelphi Paper, 155. London: IISS, 1979-1980. For the presentation of the positions taken by Turkey and Greece on their bilateral disputes see D. B. Sezer, **Turkey's Security Polices**, Adelphi Paper, 164. London: IISS, 1981; T. Veremis, **Greek Security: Issues and Politics**, Adelphi Paper, 179. London: IISS, 1982; T. A. Couloumbis, **The US, Greece and Turkey: The Troubled Triangle**. New York: Praeger, 1983; T. Bahcheli, **Greek-Turkish Relations since 1955**. Boulder: Westview, 1990.

territorial waters and (iv) the Greek fortification of Eastern Aegean islands. Each of these separate areas is entangled with the general mistrust between the two nations and with their attempts to gain political advantage in settling outstanding differences. Moreover, 'contentiousness over these issues is heightened by international legal rulings that are irritatingly noncommittal and therefore endlessly disputed'.[17] On the other hand, it should not be forgotten that the Aegean is a semi-closed sea with unique geographical features and equal strategic, economic and political importance for its two littoral states. Therefore, in order to find mutually acceptable solutions to the existing disputes, particular attention should be devoted to the establishment and maintenance of a delicate balance between the interests of the two countries. Otherwise, any conceivable attempt to remedy various disagreements in the Aegean will only be a short-lived exercise.

Territorial waters: The first dispute relates to Greece's claim that, though currently operating a six-mile limit, it is entitled to a twelve-mile territorial sea both for its mainland and for its numerous islands in the Aegean. The Turks, however, feel very differently about the matter because to them it represents an age-old attempt by Greece to turn the Aegean into a Greek lake. They point to the fact that if a 12 mile limit is implemented, then virtually all passage to high seas from Turkish Aegean and Black Sea ports would be through areas under Greek sovereignty and jurisdiction.[18] Thus, in case of an extension, Turkey will be locked out of the Aegean and confined to its own territorial waters. While international law grants the right of innocent passage, Turkish officials feels that 'Greece would be able to create artificial difficulties' as already experienced in other fields such as Flight Information Region (FIR) responsibilities.[19] Moreover, as the territorial waters issue is very much interlinked with other Aegean disputes, any extension of Greek territorial waters will have a direct bearing on the settlement of those issues, as well.[20] This is not acceptable to the Turkish

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[17] M. C. Kurop, 'Greece and Turkey; Can They Mend Fences?', **Foreign Affairs**, Vol. 77, 1998, p. 8.

[18] Under the present 6-mile limit, Greece hold approximately 43,5% of the Aegean Sea and Turkey 7,7%, remaining 49% being high seas. Should the 12-mile limit be applied, the Greek territorial sea in the Aegean will increase to 71,5% whereas Turkey's share will increase to 8,7%, and the area of high seas will be drastically reduced to 19,7%, which will also be fragmented due to existence of Greek islands. See Wilson, **op. cit.**, pp. 36-37.

[19] For official Turkish view on this issue see Turkish Foreign Ministry's web-page at **[http://www.mfa.gov.tr/GRUPF/ege.html]**, p. 3.

[20] The Aegean territorial waters issue is also linked with the Cyprus in the sense that in case of Turkey's inability to use its principal harbors in the Aegean because of enemy control of the Aegean Sea, Turkish ships could still reach to open seas from the eastern Mediterranean ports so long as the

government and they have repeatedly declared that if Greece goes ahead with the unilateral adoption of a twelve-mile territorial sea in the Aegean, it would represent a *casus belli*.

It is obvious that an extension of territorial sea is not a practical necessity for Greece unless valuable mineral resources are found on the continental shelf and Greece feels that it could not protect them in any other way. Short of that, the only other motivation for the extension of the territorial waters would be political, in a sense that a weak government might find it useful to play this emotionalised card in order to generate domestic popularity. However, the benefits that may be obtained in this way for the government must be weighed against the dangers of war with Turkey. The various Greek governments, therefore, have shown restrain so far by not extending territorial waters, even under Papandreou, thereby avoiding a dangerous confrontation. Consequently, the territorial sea dispute is stagnated and has been dormant for years.

Continental shelf: The continental shelf allows the coastal state to exercise exclusive rights of exploration and exploitation of resources under the seabed, thus it is very much related to the existence of oil in the Aegean. The dispute, in fact, stems from the fact that Greece and Turkey have never had a delimitation agreement, thus there exists no maritime boundaries in the Aegean between the two countries. It became an issue of contention between the two states when the Greek Government announced oil and natural gas discoveries in the area and went on to claim, in February 1974, most of the Aegean continental shelf. In order to prevent a Greek *fait accompli*, the then Turkish Premier Ecevit proposed to Greek Junta, then ruling in Athens, negotiations to demarcate the respective spheres of the Greek and Turkish continental shelves, but Athens did not respond.[21] Turkey, in return, send a survey ship, accompanied by warships, to the disputed areas, mainly to serve as symbol of Turkey's interest in the Aegean seabed. Since then, the dispute has continued to poison the relations as most of the other issues, in one way or another, are linked to the continental shelf issue.

The Greeks argue that most of the Aegean continental shelf belonged to them with an attendant economic zone because of the numerous Greek islands, and they deny any Turkish right in areas to the west of the Greeks

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island of Cyprus, which could bloc the navigation in the area, is controlled by a friendly government. Hence, it is the very same fear, which prompted Turkey to declare the extension of Greek territorial waters in the Aegean as *casus belli*, also encouraged its resistance to *Enosis* (union of Cyprus with Greece) designs since 1950s.

21 US Congress, Senate, *Turkey's* **Problems and Prospects: Implications for US Interests,** Report prepared by the CRS of the Library of Congress, 3 March 1980, p. 53.

islands since this, according to Greece, would constitute a threat to its sovereignty. The Turks, on the other hand, have argued alternately that much of the Aegean continental shelf is geologically an extension of the Anatolian mainland, and it should be delimited on an equitable basis.

Traditionally, Greece proposes taking the issue to the International Court of Justice, and in fact did so in August 1976. However, The Court's decision was that it did not have jurisdiction to entertain Greek application. Later in November 1976, Greece and Turkey signed an agreement in Bern and decided to hold negotiations with a view to reaching an agreement. They also undertook to refrain from any initiative or act concerning the Aegean continental shelf. The talks between the two countries continued until 1981 when Greek Premier Papandreou decided to stop any negotiations with Turkey. However, the 1976 Bern Agreement is still valid and its terms continue to be binding for both countries.

The discussion, however, has been more than academic as shown by the crises of 1976 and 1987 when explorations by one of the parties in the disputed areas led to confrontation and nearly war.[22] In fact, the Greek discoveries turned out to have been much smaller than originally estimated, and the Turkish explorations located no oil.[23] Thus, the existing resources are hardly worth fighting a war over, though the issue remains as the most contentious disagreement between the two countries.

Air-space related problems: There are basically two connected issues here. The first one relates to Greece's claim of a 10-mile national airspace over its 6-mile territorial waters, a claim disputed by Turkey which reserves, and frequently exercise, the right to fly over international airspace of the Aegean up to 6 miles to Greek mainland, thus prompting regular protests from Greece on the ground that Turkey, yet again, violated Greek national airspace. In fact, according to 1944 Chicago Convention on Civil Aviation,

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[22] In late February 1987, Greece announced it would take control of the Canadian-led international North Aegean Petroleum Consortium, which had drilling permits in northern Aegean. Later on, when Greece ordered the National Oil Company to start drilling outside Greece's territorial waters, a controversial move in Turkey's view, Turkey, too, issued permits to the state-owned Turkish Petroleum Company for soil exploration on a number of disputed regions, including the Gulf of Saros and the areas near the Greek island of Lesvos. The then Greek Premier Papandreou responded by warning that Greek armed forces would 'teach the Turks a hard lesson'. Turkey reacted by declaring that any Greek attempt to harass a Turkish research vessel would meet retaliation. The controversy was defused when Turkish Premier Özal restricted the research to Turkish territorial waters and Papandreou returned to the **status quo ante**, but not before the dispute led the two countries to the brink of war for the first time since 1974.

[23] Wilson, **op. cit.**, pp. 4 and 30; Couloumbis, **op. cit.**, p. 118.

states can have national airspace only above their territorial waters. Accordingly, Greece's claim of 10-mile airspace is recognised by no other state; and even other NATO countries often 'violate' Greek airspace during the NATO exercises in the Aegean.

The second issue is related to the Flight Information Region (FIR) responsibility over the Aegean Sea. The existing FIR arrangement on the Aegean airspace, devised in 1952 by the International Civil Aviation Organisation, puts much of the Aegean beyond Turkish national airspace under Greek responsibility. The core of the conflict is the insistence of Greece, since 1974, to use its FIR responsibility as a means to monitor Turkish movements over the Aegean. In fact, the Aegean airspace between the two countries was a 'no-go area' for a long time after 1974 as Turkey, in the wake of the Cyprus intervention, had asked with Notam 714 to be notified by any aircraft approaching Turkey from the median line in the Aegean; and Greece responded by declaring the area unsafe for international civil aviation (Notam 1157). The flights between the two countries were resumed in late1980 after two states reciprocally withdraw their Notams.

However, the problem still persist between the two countries in a 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 aircrafts to file flight plans with Athens. Turkey refuses this arguing that the FIR arrangements do not require so. Fearing that any kind of responsibility given to Turkey to the west of Greek islands might later lead to further demands regarding their sovereignty, Greece is adamant to preserve *status quo* while Turkey complains Greece's 'abuse' of its FIR responsibility and trying to use it 'as if this responsibility entails sovereign rights'.[24] So, this dispute is also related to the magic word of 'sovereignty'.

Fortification of islands: The fourth dispute in the Aegean relates to the Greek decision in the aftermath of the Cyprus intervention to fortify the islands that were demilitarised by the earlier international treaties.[25] While Turkey accuses Greece of violating international legal obligations, Greece alternately either denies the validity of such obligations or the fact of violation. Beyond the legal arguments, however, after these islands have been heavily fortified by Greece in practise, Turkey decided to establish its Fourth Army, dubbed as the 'Aegean Army' by Greeks, in İzmir. This, in turn, increased the Greek apprehensions about Turkish intentions in the Aegean. It is a 'chicken and egg' situation in which the Turks point to

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[24] See [**http://www.mfa.gov.tr/GRUPF/ege.html**], p. 8.

[25] The concerned islands are the Eastern Aegean Islands of Lemnos, Samothrace, Lesvos, Chios, Samos and Ikaria in addition to fourteen Dodecanese islands.

the need for such a force due to Greek fortification of the islands, and the Greeks talk of the need for fortification because of the 'Aegean Army'. However, it seems that the Greek fears is, as put by a British scholar, the result of 'somewhat over-heated imagination'.[26] In fact, a NATO report demonstrated years ago that the army serves for a training purposes only, contains no combat-ready units, and İzmir is not a naval base.[27]

Again the dispute arises out general mistrust. Turkish intervention in Cyprus and attempts at oil exploration in the Aegean led the Greeks to fear Turkish 'designs' against its sovereign rights in the Aegean. Turkey, on the other hand, saw at the fortification of the islands, a disrespect for legality and an attempt to undermine the *status quo* between the two countries established by the Lausanne Peace Treaty, by changing the existing balance in the Aegean to Greece's favour and then deny any Turkish right in the area. As a matter of fact, neither the Greek fortification of the islands nor the Turkish Fourth Army represent significant military threats to the other side, because, in the case of war, it would be calamitous for Turks to attempt 'island-hopping' and quite impossible for Greeks to muster an offensive to Turkish mainland from the islands (Greece's recent deployment of EXOCET guided missile batteries, however, changes the situation). But, it only adds up to general mistrust and second-guessing of each other's intentions. 'Yet, paradoxically, the less chance there is of a confrontation, the greater is the likelihood that Greece would order the disarmament of the islands', and Turkey would move its Fourth Army to interior.[28] Therefore, the resolution of the dispute over the islands and the 'Aegean Army' can come through a general alleviation of tensions.

Much of the current interest with he demilitarisation issue concentrate on the island of Lemnos, which Greece has been trying for years to designate the Greek forces on the island to NATO, thus gaining an implicit Alliance acknowledgement of the Greek case. Turkey, on the other hand, objects and vetoes this move, arguing that the existence of Greek forces on the island is illegal. In return, Greece boycotts the NATO exercises in the Aegean. Thus the dispute jeopardise Alliance's level of combat readiness in the region.

Views regarding the settlement of the Aegean disputes

In general, Greece advocates that there is no problem in the Aegean between Turkey and Greece other than the delimitation of the continental

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[26] Groom, **op. cit.**, p. 147.

[27] NATO Assembly, Political Committee, **Interim Report of the Sub-Committee on the Southern Region** (Rapporteur: Ton Frinking), AB 206 PC/SR(84)2, November 1984, pp. 29-30.

[28] Braun, **op. cit.**, p. 242.

shelf which should be resolved only through International Court of Justice (ICJ). Against Greece's 'one problem-one solution' position, Turkey traditionally argued that there exist various problems in the Aegean which should be solved through bilateral negotiations. However, recently, Turkey has broadened its traditional approach and now agrees to employ whole range of means for peaceful solutions as appropriate, though all the problems should be addressed as a whole. This move from Turkey is, in fact, a move forward since the methods of peaceful settlement of disputes as enumerated in the UN Charter includes the course to the ICJ, in addition to negotiation, good offices, conciliation, mediation, and arbitration. As Turkey announced that all of these methods are equally acceptable to her, the gap between Greek and Turkish positions has somewhat narrowed, though Greece still refuses to negotiate any issue other than continental shelf and, in return, Turkey declines to discuss disputed issues separately.

Although most of the bilateral disputes between Athens and Ankara have become intractable because the Cyprus dispute has forced the Greek and Turkish governments to become reluctant to compromise lest they are perceived as soft on 'national issues', they are not insoluble altogether, as both countries have already shown ability to contain these disputes and thereby raise the threshold of war. For example, the 1987 crisis, like the Cuban missile crisis, appeared to have a corrective effect on the attitudes of both states for a period. Apart from the crisis that brought the two states close to an armed clashes, the enormous burden of defence spending on the Greek balance of payments and the long military service, which detracted from the government's populist image, convinced the Greek Premier Papandreou that he needed to reduce the prospect of a possible outbreak of war between Greece and Turkey. Thus he, in a significant deviation from PASOK's basic foreign policy line, agreed to meet with Turkish Premier Özal in Davos in early 1988.[29] Although some progress was made in developing a set of confidence-building measures regarding accident prevention in international waters of the Aegean, thus raised hopes that a true rapprochement might follow, the 'Davos spirit' gradually lost momentum as both leaders found themselves under increasing domestic pressure. In August 1988, Papandreou cancelled a scheduled visit to Ankara. The real reason seemed political: 'to avoid giving the impression that he put a dialogue with Turkey ahead of Greek national interests'.[30] In addition, relations have been strained by incidents involving the Turkish minority in Thrace.

This experience demonstrated clearly one of the main requirements of a genuine thaw in Turkish-Greek relations. The basic weakness of the 'Davos process' was its dependence on two leaders, both of whom politically

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[29]Veremis, **op. cit.**, 123-124.

[30]Larrabee, **op. cit.**, p. 190.

weakened in time, and with them the 'spirit' waned. The self-evident truth which the 'Davos process' furnished us is that, for such a process to succeed over the long run a broader consensus in each side of the Aegean 'for increased cooperation over confrontation needs to be developed'.[31] While doing this, it should be remembered that both Greece and Turkey will be better of if they can reconcile their differences.

1. 2. Forever Cyprus

Beyond the disagreements in the Aegean, the conflict of interests over Cyprus also remains an important stumbling block to a broader Greek-Turkish rapprochement.[32] During the summer of 1992, there were signs that the Cyprus problem might, with US help, be moving closer to resolution. A breakthrough was achieved in the intercommunal negotiations, drawing up the details of a transition arrangement towards a new form of federal government for the whole island. However, another deadlock set in shortly because the Greek side, undoubtedly encouraged by the EU's acceptance to consider Greek Cypriot membership application, suddenly started to entertain aspirations to return to the *status quo ante* of July 1974. Since then, the intercommunal talks have failed to make substantial progress, and thus a solution of the Cyprus dispute remains as elusive as ever.

A new factor in the negotiations since February 1993 has been the election of President Clerides to head the Greek Cypriot government. On the Turkish side, the death of President Özal in 1993 removed one of the few proponents of a speedy resolution of the conflict. Moreover, as the country is now more occupied with the economy, the Islamic revivalism, and the Kurdish insurgency, it is unlikely that the existing coalition government would attempt bold initiatives on Cyprus, especially because most of the members of the existing cabinet is known for their hawkishness as far as Cyprus is concerned. Moreover, nobody could expect a coalition government as week as this one to make any real progress.

In addition to the Greek Cypriot efforts to join the EU, additional stress is brought to the continuing stand-off from their scheduled acquisition plan of $245 million worth of Russian medium-range surface-to-air missiles. These developments represents profound attempts on Greek side to change the Island's dormant 25-year *status quo*. Cyprus's missile purchase plans, as well as its defence pact with Greece, are signs of a government that is eager to consolidate its military position along its likely political position within

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[31] **Ibid.**

[32] A detailed discussion of the Cyprus issue is beyond the scope of this chapter. For a comprehensive study, see R. McDonald, **The Problem of Cyprus**, Adelphi Paper, 234. London: IISS, 1988-89.

the EU.[33] Turkey, on the other hand, has stated that the deployment of the missiles and Greek Cypriot entrance into the EU before Turkey would be grounds, respectively, for 'serious conflict' on the Island and 'further integration' of the TRNC with Turkey.

As far as S300 missiles issue is concerned, after emotional statements have been exchanged and excitement abated somewhat, the position of Turkey appears now to let the Greek Cypriots solve this problem which 'they brought on themselves'. It seems that the Turkish Foreign Ministry has no intention to 'come to aid' of the Greek Cypriots in their attempt to find a face-saving formula as they increasingly realized the seriousness of Turkey on this account.

In the meantime, the EU's stand has gradually changed regarding the Cyprus issue since late 1980. The Community, which adopted a 'hands-off' and 'non-involvement' policies on Cyprus until 1980, had to face complications after Greece formally became a full member in 1981. Since then, as the distance between Turkey and its ambition of becoming member of the EU has grew apart, the relations between Greek Cypriots and the EU got closer and Cyprus started to appear on the EU agenda more often. In the process, however, the EU has increasingly changed its balanced position on both the Greek-Turkish relations and also on Cyprus issue, leaning more towards the Greek side. Consequently and openly since 1988, the Union has demonstrated implicit support for Greek Cypriot's point of view.

In addition, the changing regional context in which Turkey and Greece now approach the Cyprus question is another input that has to be taken into consideration. The end of the Cold War and the escalating crisis situation in the Balkans have brought to light a new set of regional variables and inter-dependencies to consider.

It became quite clear by now that the decline of the Cold War has had a mixed impact on the Cyprus issue. To be sure, it brought about changes that have substantially affected both Turkey and Greece, which bound to create an inescapable impact on the Island itself. First of all, although the international community do not generally like to see new borders created by force of arms, at the end of the Cold War and after the bloody experiences of the former Yugoslavia and Soviet Union, there is an increasing tendency today, particularly among great powers, to yield to the 'separation of ethnic groups for the sake of preserving regional peace'.[34] Thus, from the point of view of Turkish foreign policy, 'approaches based on community interests in

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[33] Kurop, **op. cit.**, p. 9.

[34] T. Bahcheli, 'Cyprus in the Post-Cold War Era', in T. Bahcheli, T. Couloumbis and P. Carley, **Greek-Turkish Relations and US Foreign Policy**. Washington: US Institute of Peace, 1997, p. 20.

the conflicts in Bosnia and Nagorno-Karabakh have strengthened arguments in favour of applying similar criteria to the resolution of the Cyprus dispute'.[35]

In addition, the increasing number of ethnic conflicts since the end of the Cold War has strained the UN budget for peacekeeping operations to a point that many observers now started to call an end for UN peacekeeping force on Cyprus as it seems less urgent when compared to other hot spots around the world.[36] Moreover, the end of the Cold War, on the one hand, has made Turkey less important, in a sense, to the US and especially to Western Europe, with containment no longer being a strategic option for the West. That led many analysts, as well as optimist in the Greek camp, to conclude early on that Turkey would henceforth get less support for its external policies, including Cyprus. On the other hand, however, the decline of the Cold War has also brought about ethnic disputes and bloody clashes all around Turkey, which promptly elevated Turkey again to the post of indispensable ally to the West in general in dealing with these problems, which means that Turkey still has some leverage over Western, especially the US, positions about Cyprus. Furthermore, there is also the impact of the new Turkish interest in Central Asia to consider. To the extent that the West desires to have a Westernised influence there to offset the influence of Iranian-style Islam, wooing Turkey becomes important. On the other hand, however, Turkey's attempt to build its ties to Central Asia might reinforce the attitude in Europe that Turkey is not really a European nation. The former scenario would mean that Turkey was still important to the West in ways that would inhibit direct challenges to Turkey's position on Cyprus. The latter, on the other hand, would strongly encourage the West to support the Greek Cypriot view or to move toward admitting just the Greek part of Cyprus to the EU.

Greek Cypriots also worry that the UN reunification plan drafted in 1993 implicitly recognises Turkish Cypriot self-rule while outwardly supporting Greek Cypriot claims to overall sovereignty. The proposal for a 'bi-communal, bi-zonal federation' of north and south is viewed by Greeks as the '*de jure* recognition of a *de facto* partition'.[37] Thus they are now trying to back down, with the help of EU membership, from the long-agreed positions of bi-communality and bi-zonality. Turkish Cypriot President Denktas, on the other hand has been trying, since the EU decision to consider Greek application, to get back into the process as an equally recognised partner. The recent proposals by Turkish Cypriots to exchange properties between Greek

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[35] Spencer, **op. cit.**, p. 19.

[36] T. Bahcheli and N. Rizopoulos, 'The Cyprus Impasse: What Next?', **World Policy Journal**, Vol. 13, 1996, pp. 29-30.

[37] Quoted from van Coufoudakis by Kurop, **op. cit.**, p. 9.

and Turkish Cypriots to further consolidate bi-zonality and to establish a 'confederation' between the two sides, each having a symmetrical special relationship with Greece and Turkey respectively, were openings aimed at bringing the Greek Cypriots back to the negotiating table. However, obviously based on the calculation that time is on their side after all, the Greek Cypriots immediately refused both proposals.[38]

Thus, as things stand today, the outlook on a quick Cyprus settlement is not promising and the conflict today remains little closer to resolution than it did in 1974. Both Greek and Turkish Cypriots strongly hold views which are incompatible, and although the intercommunal talks have contributed to the bridging of the gaps on some issues, multitude of diplomatic initiatives conducted by the UN, the US, NATO and the EU have all, so far, run aground on the question of how sovereignty is going to be shared between the two communities. In the meantime, *status quo* has solidified, making any return to the *status quo ante* more difficult. The Turkish Cypriots are relatively content with the existing state of affairs, whereas 'the Greek Cypriot side wants to change it but is unwilling to make the compromises acceptable to the Turks'.[39] Moreover, there is also a dangerous pitfall in the fact that Cyprus's application for membership to the EU is seen by the Turks as a means of pre-empting a political agreement with the Turkish side. It is clear by now that, 'by over-stating their case in Brussels', the Greek Cypriots might have minimise 'their chances of success with the UN'.[40]

Although, a settlement of Cyprus problem can provide a necessary catalyst for an improvement in Greek-Turkish relations, even the priorities that the Turkish and Greek governments attest to Cyprus issue is significantly divergent and hotly disputed at times. Turkey, considering 'the present state of affairs in Cyprus advantageous to its interests, is in no hurry to reach an agreement that would entail surrendering some of the gains from the 1974 intervention'.[41] Greece, on the other hand, is absolutely adamant that the resolution of the Cyprus issue should precede the discussion of bilateral differences in the Aegean, which is also, according to Greece, limited to the continental shelf dispute alone.

In this context, Turkey has long been argued that the Cyprus problem was not a dispute between Greece and Turkey, but an intercommunal dispute between Turkish and Greek Cypriots, thus should be resolved through intercommunal talks with the UN mediation. And during the negotiations,

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[38] See **Milliyet**, 1, 2 and 25 September 1998.

[39] Larrabee, **op. cit.**, p. 175.

[40] Spencer, **op. cit.**, p. 20.

[41] Veremis, **op. cit.**, p. 130.

the Turkish Cypriots have increasingly emphasised a solution which would keep the two communities essentially separate in a loose bi-zonal federation between the two autonomous republics that restricts contact between the two communities. Greek Cypriots, on the other hand, favour unitary state, but seem ready to embrace a tightly knitted federation between two zones, emphasising the so-called three freedoms anywhere in the Island. However, the Turks, arguing that the implementation of these freedoms would render the idea of bi-zonality meaningless and could lead to Greek Cypriot domination once again, are reluctant to accept them.[42]

On the other hand, the events of 1974 and related developments since then have highlighted the enmity between Greece and Turkey and created a psychological block to true reconciliation. Furthermore, 'a mixed society that has been destroyed by force once can not be reconstituted, at least not until ethnic hatred has subsided and the wounds of separation have been healed'.[43] It may be overcome, but it will take a very long time. In the mean time, a *de facto* settlement has emerged in Cyprus since 1974. Therefore, 'the idea that Greeks can be resettled', any time soon and without a final solution is worked out in detail, 'among the Turks of northern Cyprus is quite impracticable', for any such attempt would inevitably lead to a renewal of the bloodshed that ceased in Cyprus in August 1974. Although, until very recently, nobody has been killed in Cyprus, it has been due to an effective separation of the two communities, not for a rapprochement in views and feelings. In the absence of an overall settlement which is acceptable to the majority of the people on both sides of the Green Line, the West (more so the EU now) is wrong to push for a settlement that has no chance of succeeding, as 'recreating an ethnically mixed Cyprus under a federal government' would only help to 'multiply points of friction between Greeks and Turks and is not a sensible goal'.[44]

Thus, although it is desirable to the international community to settle the Cyprus issue once and for all, until a more durable settlement is put in its place, the present position should be accepted *de jure*. Based on this acceptance, Greece and Turkey can then gradually improve their understanding over Cyprus as both parties would see the uselessness of undermining each other on the wider international stage.

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42 See E. B. Laipson, **Cyprus: Status of UN Negotiations**, Washington, CRS, Library of Congress, March 8, 1990.

43 A. Mango, **Turkey: The Challenge of a New Role**. Washington: Praeger, 1994, p. 127.

44 **Ibid.**

2. Manoeuvring in the EU and NATO

As the disputes over Cyprus and the Aegean were contained, both countries have attempted to outflank each other in the EU and in NATO as well as in their bilateral relations with other Balkan states.

Given its direct relationship with both countries, it would be quite impossible for the European Union to stay out of entanglement in the complicated issues surrounding the Greek-Turkish dispute. In fact, Greece became an associate member of the then EC in November 1962 and has been a full member since January 1981. Turkey, on the other hand, is an associate member, having signed agreement with the Community in September 1963, and a customs union protocol in March 1995.

However, Union's engagement in Greek-Turkish disputes has not always been strong, but rather declaratory up until late 1980s. It seemed that the Community lacked the political will to go beyond verbal clichés in order to play a more substantive role in efforts to resolve the Greek-Turkish dispute. It looked as if the Community lacked the capacity to harmonise the perceptions and interests of its members with regard to these issues. As a result, the EC launched no initiatives of its own to further the resolution of either Aegean or the Cyprus disputes. Instead, it confined its actions to occasionally expressing hope, satisfaction or dissatisfaction in the UN Secretary General's efforts concerning these problems, and endorsing related UN resolutions. In short, the EC avoided from declarations on the causes of these disputes, limiting itself to occasional statements acknowledging the need for a 'peaceful, fair and viable settlement' of the existing problems.[45]

Notwithstanding the Community's attempt to stay clear of the Greek-Turkish disputes, both countries, as associate members, attempted to employ the Community to condemn actions and policies of the other. Their use of the Community Joint Parliamentary Committees, which offered regular opportunities for discussions until 1978, to pass and exchange polemical resolutions helped make the Community aware of the dangers of becoming embroiled in the dispute.[46]

More complications started to emerge after Greece formally applied for the EC membership on 12 June 1975. While afraid of becoming entangled in the fiery Greek-Turkish friction, the Community felt obliged to dispel any

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[45] C. Melakopides, 'Cyprus, Greece and Turkey from the European Community Perspective', in C. P. Ioannides (ed.), **Cyprus: Domestic Dynamics, External Constraints**. New York: de Caratzas, 1992, p. 67.

[46] It was only after the intervention of the President of the European Parliament by banning matters arising from the Greco-Turkish conflict from their resolutions, that this practice ended.

impression that it was prepared to favour Greece. After all, if the EC looked as if it were leaning toward Greece, Turkey could have perceived itself as being alienated. Thus, in its *Opinion* on Greece's membership, the European Commission, while stating clearly that it would not become involved in the controversy between Turkey and Greece, also called for a pre-accession period for Greece.[47] However, the Council of Ministers rejected the Commission's Opinion under apparently political influences, and convinced, perhaps, that as a member of the Community, Greece might become more amenable to solve its problems with Turkey. Consequently, negotiations for Greece's membership were completed on 3 April 1979, and the signing of a Treaty of Accession in Athens on 28 May 1979 led to Greece's becoming the tenth Community member on 1 January 1981.

While negotiations were underway for Greece's entry, Community members further tried to subdue Turkish fears that if Greece becomes a member before Turkey, she might deny her right to membership or make it conditional to concessions received from Turkey on the Aegean or Cyprus. Consequently, statements were issued from various EC officials to the effect that the EC would not allow itself to be drawn into the Greek-Turkish disputes over Aegean and Cyprus. Hence, the Community's 'hands-off' policy was being supplemented by a more active yet still 'balanced' stance on the Greek-Turkish dispute, apparently intending to reflect an overall sense of equidistant from the both sides.

However, when Greece joined the then EC in January 1981, a dramatic shift occurred in the position of the two states. It is clear now that Greek membership has profoundly altered the Community's relations with Ankara, a development long dreaded by Turkey. Greece now has the political and economic weight of the Community behind her. Although it is quite difficult for Greece to bring this weight on Turkey directly to bear regarding their various disagreements, the EU, nevertheless, finds itself increasingly at odds with Turkey because of variety of ways Greece is trying to utilise the Union's resources in its disputes with Turkey.[48] Therefore, the Union can no

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[47] 'In the view of the Commission, specific steps will need to be taken...[to ensure] that the examination of the Greek application for membership will not affect relations between the Community and Turkey and that the rights guaranteed by the Association Agreement with Turkey would not be affected thereby'. **Bulletin of the European Communities, Supplement**, 2/76, p. 7.

[48] For example, eager to reinforce its hold on islands of Turkey's coast, last December Greece won approval from the unsuspecting European Commission to establish nature sanctuaries on several disputed islets and rocks in the Aegean. A comment from the Greek government spokesman Dimitris Reppas that 'the Commission's decision confirms Greek sovereignty over islands Turkey may contest. It strikes two birds with one

longer play the role of a honest broker between two countries while its credibility in Turkey has been discredited as biased. However, it can still play a vital role in the case of Greece, over which the EU has a greater power of persuasion in convincing a member state that it should improve relations with a country which the Union has a special relationship.

Whilst Turkey cannot regain its earlier position vis-à-vis Greece in the EU until it obtains full membership, it is not completely without influence in other Europe-related theatres such as the WEU, NATO, and OSCE. In the case of NATO, it enjoyed a temporary advantage between 1974, when Greece withdrawn from NATO military structure, and October 1980, when it was allowed to reintegrate under the Rogers Plan. According to this plan, it was agreed that two new headquarters (6th and 7th ATAF) were to establish respectively in İzmir and Larisa, and command and control responsibilities in the Aegean would then be shared among them. However, Greek Premier Papandreou, after taking over the government in 1981, refused to proceed with the establishment of the command until the operational responsibilities of the two headquarters have been agreed upon. Later on, he declared the pre-1974 command and control delimitation as 'non-negotiable'.[49] Since then, no improvement has achieved and the issue still remains as one of the minor disputing grounds between the two countries.

It should also be remembered that both countries' relations with NATO have undergone change from the Cold War through dtente to the post-Cold War era. During the Cold War, the southern periphery was a source of instability and turmoil. Many Western policy makers, in fact, initially questioned whether it was wise to accept Greece and Turkey into NATO.[50]

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stone', clearly indicates to the real intention behind Greece's newly-found enthusiasm for the protection of wild life. As Greece 'didn't seem to care much about birds until after the 1996 crisis', even the director of the World Wildlife Fund's Athens Office, Dimitris Karavelas, questions 'whether the government's commitment to endangered species is as great as its political interests'. Greece had tried in the past to lure settlers to the sparsely settled islands by offering cheap land and subsidies. But, the isolation and instability made the program a hard sell, and after the 1996 crisis it collapsed. The ecological project might yield to a better results. J. Wilde and A. Carassava, **Time International**, 27 April 1988, p. 26. Greece also tried to extract a statement from the EU during the Kardak/Imia crisis, condemning Turkey, including remarks about how EU's borders end at the Greek islands in the Aegean. However, the European countries were carefully quite and only official statement was a call to resolve problems through dialogue. See **Turkish Daily News**, 8 February 1996, 'What's in a Name?'; and 28 February 1996, 'Public Eye'.

[49] For Papandreou's speech in Athens Home Service, December 5, 1985, see **BBC, SWB**, December 11, 1985, p. C/4.

[50] Larrabee, **op. cit.**, p. 175.

In the first decade after their entry, however, these doubts significantly diminished as both countries vigorously cooperated with the Alliance, putting their national interests behind Alliance cohesion. Accordingly, NATO had more leverage then the EC over both countries during the Cold War, and, unlike the EC, put considerable pressure on them to reach a settlement. Again unlike the EU, NATO proved to be a valuable forum for conflict resolution and mediation, as well as a safety valve for various tensions.

However, in the post-Cold War era, number of extra-regional issues in contiguous areas and growing potential for instability in the Middle East, the Balkans, and the Caucasus have affected threat perceptions of both countries. Most importantly, the collapse of the Soviet Union reduced the sense of threat felt by Turkey and Greece from the North. This sense of reduced threat, in turn, underscored 'the centrifugal trends on the southern periphery, which...have made both countries...less willing to contribute to collective defence'.[51]

Regarding the US, Greece has been exceptionally sensitive to any effort to drop the 7:10 ratio informally set by Congress concerning aid to Greece and Turkey. Greece sees the ratio as vital for maintaining the balance of power in the Aegean and regards any attempt to eliminate it as an obvious American favour for Turkey. On the other hand, Turkey deeply resents Congressional move to link the assistance to Turkey with Greek needs, because it gives Greece direct leverage over Turkish security.

Greece also has periodically sought a security guarantee against Turkey, which the US has so far declined to give on the ground that the NATO Treaty had already provided that. Greek policy makers fears that, as indications that the US is interested in enhancing its influence in the Caucasus and Central Asia grew, it will regard Turkey as a useful partner in this enterprise, thus tilting towards Turkey. Moreover, as the new European security identity is increasingly undermining NATO's preeminence in European theatre, Greece also fears that 'the US might draw closer to the non-EU members of NATO', i.e., Turkey, in the eastern Mediterranean to be able to intervene the developments in the Middle East, Caucasus and the Balkans.[52]

In addition to NATO and the EU, Greece also sought to play a more active role in the WEU. Greece's application to join the WEU at the end of 1988 was motivated mainly by its aim to gain greater West European

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[51] **Ibid.**, p. 177.

[52] Veremis, **op. cit.**, p. 125.

support for its position vis-à-vis Turkey.[53] However, it was asked by the full members of the WEU at 1991 summit to provide 'guarantees that it will never invoke some of the security provisions in this organisation, a requirement at best contradictory and at worst downright insulting against a full EC member'.[54] Moreover, the EC's decision at Maastrict that Article 5 of the modified Treaty of Brussels -which provides a security guarantee in case of attack on members- should not be applied between member states of NATO and the WEU (in fact, the only conceivable future scenario that a conflict might occur between the members of the two institutions was that of between Greece and Turkey) caused considerable irritation in Athens and has somewhat diminished the importance of WEU membership from Greece's point of view.[55]

Paradoxically, Greece has a stake in the success of Turkey's European aspirations, because 'the process would tend to strengthen the latter's democratic institutions and minimise its assertiveness in its relations with its Western neighbours'.[56] Although Turkey's entry into the EU has been postponed, Greece should support Turkish entry in the future as Greece's political and economic interests would be more easily served by a Turkey in the EU than a Turkey outside it. It was in recognition of this fact that the Greek Foreign Minister Pangalos announced the obvious when he declared in March 1997 that 'Turkey certainly belongs to Europe'.[57]

3. Balkan connection

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, both Turkey and Greece have sought to improve their relations with the other Balkan countries and have shown an interest in increased regional cooperation. Beyond, the fairly usual political, military and economic reasons, however, their main aim in pursuing an active policy in the Balkans appears to gain support for their policy objectives in their bilateral dispute and to avoid being outflank by the other.[58]

With their general efforts to increase their security in the region, Greece appears to prefer multilateral relations while Turkey leans more towards bilateral contacts. Although the intensive struggle of the Greek and Turkish leaders to gain the support of their neighbours for their own

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[53] Larrabee, **op. cit.**, p. 181.

[54] J. Eyal, 'A Force for Good in a Cauldron of Turmoil', **The European**, 3-6 September 1992.

[55] Veremis, **op. cit.**, p. 125.

[56] **Ibid.**, p. 129.

[57] Kurop, **op. cit.**, p. 10.

[58] Larrabee, **op. cit.**, p. 91; Braun, **op. cit.**, p. 246.

positions did not produce comparable returns, bilateral and multilateral cooperation, nevertheless, have motivated and helped to bring about increased contact between Greece and Turkey which, in the longer term, may paradoxically enhance the prospect of mutually beneficial cooperation between the two countries. While this does not guarantee a speedy solution to the Greek-Turkish disputes, it at least outlines the areas of common interests, thereby helping to narrow the gap among them.

However, the past record of both countries on regional cooperation testifies that even though they have been allies since 1952, they usually evaluated proposals for collaboration primarily with the 'other side' in mind, and in time have moved into a zero-sum game.[59] The crisis that caused by the break-up of the former Yugoslavia has offered a unique example of how their mutual competition effects their foreign and security policy making.

It was argued that the pro-Serbian policies of Greece during the Bosnian crisis was based, to a large extent, on its perception of how the evolving situation might or might not work to Turkey's advantage.[60] Although close ties between the Greeks and Serbians have deep historical roots, including a shared Orthodox heritage, the collapse of the former Yugoslavia, however, has given these traditional ties a new dimension. First of all, Greece was uneasy about the idea of a new Muslim state almost on its border. The possibility of such an entity encouraged worst-case scenarios 'because of the Greeks' foregone conclusion that a Muslim state, with positive roots in Ottoman history, would be friendly to Turkey'.[61] Moreover, both Greece and Serbia share a common concern about the emergence of an independent Macedonia as well as a desire to prevent the expansion of Turkish influence in the Balkans. Accordingly, Serbia and the Bosnian Serbs were supported fully by Greece, sometimes bordering a *de facto* alliance. Similarly, Greece's new-found detachment from Serbians also represents a lessening of fears that Turkey will destabilise the balance of power in the Balkans through ties to Muslim and Turkish populations in the region.

The rapprochement between Bulgaria and Turkey after the advent of the *Union of Democratic Forces* to power in Bulgaria provides another example of the regional alignments that have begun to emerge with he end of the Cold War. Since 1989, relations have improved to an unprecedented levels as highlighted by the signing in May 1992 of a Treaty of Friendship

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[59] D. Sezer in W. Mastany and R. C. Nation (eds.), **Turkey Between East and West: New Challenges for a Rising National Power**. Boulder, Oxford: Westview, 1996, p. 83.

[60] **Ibid.**, p. 84.

[61] **Ibid.**

and Cooperation. This rapprochement, on the other hand, has contributed to a cooling of Sofia's relations with Athens. Although relations have improved since then, many Greek officials remain suspicious about the possibility that, at some point, Bulgaria, with Turkish support and encouragement, might raise claims against Greek territory. They have, therefore, viewed the Bulgarian-Turkish rapprochement with some misgivings.

During the Cold War, Turkey generally maintained a low-key profile in the Balkans which was largely regarded as secondary importance to its foreign and security policies. However, the end of the Cold War has dramatically altered Turkey's strategic environment and she has started to play a more active role in the Balkan affairs as well as in the Caucasus and Central Asia.[62] One of the earlier indications of Turkey's newly found interest in the Balkans was the Black Sea Economic Cooperation initiative. This was basically Turkey's response to its feeling of loneliness at the end of the Cold War after being 'abandoned' by the West (i.e., Europe).

On the other hand, the war in Bosnia has also increased the pressures on Ankara to play a more active role in the Balkans. Though Bosnia is several hundred miles from Turkey's borders and the Bosnian Moslems are not ethnic Turks, it seems that Turkish public opinion has developed a feeling of kinship and responsibility for the Moslems left behind by the retreating Ottoman Empire from the Balkans after around five hundred years of domination. Moreover, the existence of substantial number of 'Boshnaks', Turkish citizens of Bosnian origin, about four to five million, in Turkey further increased the identification of Turkish people with the Bosnian Moslems. As a result, Turkey lent strong political and moral support to the Bosnian Muslims and also stepped up military cooperation with Albania. These moves reinforced fears in Athens of the emergence of an 'Islamic arc' in the Balkans on Greece's northern border.

In this context, it could be argued that during the Cold War, the Balkans were essentially divided into two blocks, with Yugoslavia acting as a neutral go-between. However, at the end of the Cold War, new regional alignments are beginning to emerge to form two rival groups that could change the security relations in the region. The first of the two 'axes' consists of Albania, Macedonia, Turkey and possibly Bosnia-Herzegovina in the long run; the other includes the Serb dominated Yugoslav state, Greece and 'an outside force', the Russian Federation.[63] In this context, both Greece

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[62]For an analysis of the Turkish position in the Balkans after the end of the Cold War see, G. Winrow, **Where East Meets West: Turkey and the Balkans**. London: Alliance Publishers, 1993.

[63]C. P. Danopoulos, Turkey and the Balkans: Searching for Stability, in C. P: Danopoulos and K. G. Messas (eds.), **Crises in the Balkans**. Boulder: Westview, 1997, p. 214; F. S. Larrabee, 'Balkan Security after the Cold

and Turkey declare that they aim a strategic balance in the Balkans. However, as they are moved by the perception that the other side enjoys a strategic advantage in the region, each side invariably feels the need to amend this imagined strategic imbalance. As a result, both countries have worked to achieve a favourable strategic foothold in the Balkan peninsula over the contested area, and the break-up of former Yugoslavia gave their efforts a sense of urgency while at the same time complicating matters. For example, Greece, objected vehemently to the deployment of Turkish soldiers in Bosnia to join the IFOR/SFOR forces out of fear that their presence would 'dangerously [destabilise the] balance of power in the region'.[64] Thus, although the situation in the Balkans is not explosive as far as Turkish-Greek relations are concerned, there is an ever-present danger of becoming unwillingly involved on opposing sides of a more comprehensive Balkan conflagration.

Therefore, a new strategic balance is in the making in the Balkans, and Turkey and Greece, as they are on the forefront of the developments in the region, will be in large part responsible for the shape and the nature of the emerging balance and regional security framework throughout the whole southeastern Europe.

4. Greece and Turkey; can they reconcile?

Greek-Turkish differences are not new, but as long as they remain unresolved, there is a chance that some unforeseen incident could touch off a conflict. Continuing disputes over Cyprus, over the Aegean, over membership in and association with the EU, in relations with NATO and in areas of bilateral and multilateral relations with the other Balkan states, all have the potential to threaten the bilateral and regional security.

Yet, none of the issues outlined above is really insoluble; what makes them appear so obstinate is that 'both sides bring to the problem all their susceptibility to real or imagined humiliations. When a nation's very being is staked on every detail, and every issue is infused with the collective memory of past hurts, even the best-meant efforts may be doomed to failure'.[65] The actual situation in Cyprus, for example, though far from ideal, represents a sort of uneasy *modus vivendi* which lessens the likelihood of direct military confrontation between Greece and Turkey. The Aegean

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War: New Dimensions, New Challenges', in F. S. Larrabee (ed.), **The Volatile Powder Keg: Balkan Security after the Cold War**. Washington: The American University Press, 1994, pp. xx.

[64] Danopoulos, **ibid.**, p. 217.

[65] N. Kohlhase, 'The Greco-Turkish Conflict from a European Community Perspective', **The World Today**, Vol. 37, April 1981, p. 130.

disputes are also soluble, 'barring any major discoveries of oil'.[66] The resolution of the air traffic control dispute in 1980 showed that they can cooperate when rationality rules. Today, the two countries can agree to disagree, particularly because few material interests are involved and some disputes have become less important with the ending of the Cold War. Thus, it should be recognised by both sides that a military confrontation cannot bring about desired results and is not worth for any potential gain either side may make.

Irrationality, of course, is always a present element and war may still break out between the two countries or relations may deteriorate sharply. In this context, the experience of January 1996, when the two countries almost came to blows over the tiny and uninhabited Aegean rocks, has not only raised concerns about the two countries' ability to prevent differences from escalating into a major crisis, but also their ability to resolve them without engaging in direct military confrontation.[67] Yet, current trends, despite frequent flares, tend to indicate that the two countries are doomed to cooperate, though breaking the deadlock in the Greek-Turkish dispute will not be easy.

Obviously, Turkey is not as preoccupied by Greece as Greece is by Turkey. Indeed, the feud with Greece is peripheral to Turkey's main concerns, among which the economic development to catch the European standards and finding ways to come to terms with Kurdish nationalism at home now assume a greater prominence.[68] The general belief in Turkey, both among decision-makers and people at large, is that a bilateral dialogue is necessary, and the issues are not irreconcilable provided Greece is able to acknowledge Turkey's legitimate fears and rights in the Aegean and ready to engage in dialogue with Turkey without, at the same time, trying to score some point against her in the EU, NATO, the UN or in any other medium that Turkey temporarily relaxes its vigilance.

For the Turkish government, the basic parameter is the Treaty of Lausanne for any reconciliation in the Aegean. Turkey's belief in this regard is that the Lausanne Treaty established a delicate balance between the two countries in the Aegean and Greece has been trying for years to change that balance in its favour through unilateral acts. 'It is clear that if one of the littoral states unilaterally extends its jurisdiction in the Aegean and deprives the other coastal state from exercising its existing rights, it is no longer possible to speak of the Lausanne balance in the Aegean'.[69] According to

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[66] Braun, **op. cit.**, p. 248.

[67] Danopoulos, **op. cit.**, p. 214.

[68] Mango, **op. cit.**, 122; Groom, **op. cit.**, 147.

[69] See **[http://www.mfa.gov.tr/GRUPF/aegean.html]**, p. 1.

Turkish Foreign Ministry, the fundamental source of tension between Turkey and Greece 'is the Greek perception to regard the entire Aegean as a Greek sea in total disregard of Turkey's legitimate rights and vital interests'.[70] On more practical issues, Turkish arguments are usually a mixture of legal and political views with frequent appeals on a basis of equity. At the worst-case scenario of Turkish decision-makers, if Turkey feels that it will be boxed in because of any Greek extension of territorial waters beyond six miles, then there will be war; at best, the Aegean could become 'an area of fruitful cooperation between Greece and Turkey to their mutual benefit'.[71]

In general, the sovereignty of Greece in the Aegean is not challenged by Turkey, though the argument that the Greek sovereignty is not absolute as it is limited by international agreements is stated frequently.[72] However, Greece does not appear to prepare to admit that Turkey might have a case, or something to fear. Greek fears, on the other hand, are basically based on the concern that its sovereignty over its numerous Aegean islands could be circumscribed significantly by Turkish claims for equity, and encouraged by conscious or unconscious misapprehensions about Turkey's 'aggressiveness' against Greece.[73] It is obvious that, justified or unjustified, the fear of Turkey rules the political minds of Greeks. Thus, instead of trying to come to a mutual understanding with Turkey on the basis of mutual equity and reciprocity, they try to cling on a vigorous defence of their positions in legal arguments. This, however, creates a suspicion in Turkey to the fact that Greece does not wish to come to terms with Turkey; that its main aim is to enlarge its hold in the Aegean; and that it tries to undermine Turkey's relations with other countries continually, especially in Europe; thus actually creating a more dangerous environment for both countries. So, we are back again to mutual suspicion and mistrust.

How we can break this vicious circle is not clear, but, in the past, constraints imposed on both countries, primarily by NATO and the US, have helped to prevent hostilities between two rivals. In general, 'as long as security in the eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East continues to be high on NATO agenda, Greece and Turkey will still be under pressure not to jeopardise the solidarity of the Alliance's southern flank'.[74]

However, it is generally accepted on both side of the Aegean that the existing problems between two countries can not be solved easily at any time soon, thus both sides have to learn to live with them. The current

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[70] See **[http://www.mfa.tr/GRUPF/ege.html]**.

[71] Groom, **op. cit.**, p. 148.

[72] **Ibid.**, p. 147.

[73] **Ibid.**

[74] Danopoulos, **op. cit.**, p. 214.

problems between the two countries must be taken up with a new and realistic approach, by isolating them from the emotions stemming from history and the chains imposed by temporary considerations. Otherwise, there is no ground for optimism as long as the biggest success of the efforts to solve the problems, remains frequently conveyed summit meetings without concrete results. Leaders in both sides have to come up with new methods and imaginative ideas to overcome current bottlenecks and have to differentiate future 'dialogue' from the existing cacophony.

What is needed, at the moment, is a 'means of exploring the problems in a non-negotiating, non-coercive, problem-solving frameworks so that there are not winners and losers, but only winners'.[75] In this context, the development of Greek-Turkish economic relations may be the most important element in the long-term improvement of relations. These then can lay the groundwork for a broader political dialogue at a later date.

It is clear that the improvement of Greek-Turkish relations depend on mutually sustained efforts to this end. Accordingly, on its part, Turkey, increasingly feeling the burden of its conflicts with Greece, which also frustrates its efforts towards improved relations with the EU, has been, since 1980s, active in searching ways to find an opening in relations while Greece, perhaps considering the Aegean *status quo* in its favour, has been reluctant to take up Turkey's various efforts of discussions since late Premier Andreas Papandreou ended bilateral talks with Turkey in 1981.

In this context, Turkey, which had been adamant for years in its argument that, left alone, Turkey and Greece can solve their problems and that third party involvement in their dispute have in the past generally complicated issues, changed its situation recently and, with an opening in March 1996 from the Prime Minister Mesut Yilmaz, accepted third party solutions, to be based on mutual consent, for the overall settlement of all Aegean issues (in Cyprus, the UN has been involved right from the beginning).

Then, after agreeing, in May 1997, to establish a 'Wisemen Group' between the two countries for the purpose of seeking possible solutions for all Aegean issues in an informal and non-binding manner, and signing the Madrid Declaration in July 1997, Turkey produced a comprehensive 'peace initiative' to finally settle Aegean problems. Turkish proposals, which were passed to Greece on 12 February 1998, called for jointly identifying the Aegean problems between the two countries; formalising the 'Madrid Declaration' in the form of an Agreement of Friendship and Cooperation; developing 'confidence building measure in the Aegean' with the collaboration of the Secretary General of NATO; laying the ground for a code

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[75] Groom, **op. cit.**, p. 147.

of conduct abided by the two sides, so that Turkey and Greece avoid unilateral steps and actions that could increase tension, once the process of peaceful settlement is under way; and conveying a high level meeting between the two foreign ministers to discuss these issues.[76] In his press conference, where the initiative was made public, the Foreign Minister Cem further clarified Turkish position by stating that Turkey now would consider *whole range of means for the peaceful solution* of the disputes as a whole.[77] Thus, it does not exclude any mechanism for a peaceful solution for the existing problems in the Aegean.

This is a move forward from traditional Turkish position that the existing problems can only be solved through bilateral negotiations. However, Greece responded to this initiative through a letter by Foreign Minister Pangalos, dated 20 February 1998, reiterating its long-standing position of 'one problem-one means of settlement'.[78] Further verbal notes from Cem to Pangalos did not change the situation and the issue seems to come to halt at the moment. It is obvious that the Greek position that there is only one problem in the Aegean does not help the situation. Today, there are several interrelated problems in the Aegean which is the main reason for the tense and dangerous state of affairs between the two countries. Denying this reality does not help defusing the tension in the Aegean.

Although the establishment of the Costas Simitis government in January 1996, had enabled Turkey to hope for some improvement in relations; neither the Greek conservatives nor nationalists in both sides, have become less opinionated about Cyprus, Aegean and other disputes. Moreover, the Greek and Turkish media have become more dangerous in a sense that they now appear to be able to influence the foreign and domestic policies of their respective countries more than ever and that they would do anything to raise their circulation, including to start an armed clash between the two countries, as we have already observed immediately before the Kardak/Imia crisis.

Nevertheless, on a more positive tune, Greek foreign policy appears to undergo a positive transformation under Prime Minister Simitis. The somewhat aggressive image and tone of contemporary Greek politics, embodied by his predecessor, late Andreas Papandreou, together with his strident nationalistic and confrontational remarks, have been changing, and

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[76] Ministry of Foreign Affairs Information Department, **Press Release**, 'A Call for Peace from Turkey to Greece', February 12, 1998.

[77] **Milliyet**, February 13, 1998. Emphasizes are mine.

[78] **Milliyet**, February 21, 1998, 'Greece Turns Down Turkish Proposals'. Also see 'Information Note on the Turkish Views Regarding the Greek Reply', at **[http://www.mfa.gov.tr/GRUPH/Release/1998/10.html]**.

with them many obstructive aspects of the country's domestic and foreign policy.[79] Behind this change lies the understanding in Greece for the first time that it is part of Europe and that its political and economic success is 'wholly dependent on the extent to which it chooses to cultivate its relationship with the European Union'.[80] This realisation has eased Greece's perceived insecurity over its identity crisis between Europe and the East, which created a defensive, and sometimes antagonistic attitude towards its regional neighbours. However, biggest obstacle in front of Greece's more concentrated economic and political cooperation with Europe remains its differences with Turkey. Therefore, stabilising, if not resolving, differences with Turkey is a prerequisite if Greece is to achieve its larger foreign policy objectives.

Similarly, it is the same differences that postpone Turkey's hopes for obtaining full EU membership. When one considers the developments in Western Europe since Greece became EU member in 1981, the inescapable conclusion is that, in terms of power politics, the relationship between Greece and Turkey has been changing. Turkey today has fallen behind Greece economically. Although Greece, too, is faced with difficult economic problems, these problems are now 'oriented towards the future: Greece has a fixed place in Europe and a clearly defined task. Turkey has neither. Undoubtedly, today it is Turkey which feels solitary and isolated from Europe'.[81] On the other hand, the European Union cannot simply allow Turkey to fall into economic and consequent political chaos. Therefore, despite outflanking attempts by Greece, the Union will have to deal with Turkey and will have to bring it somehow into cooperation.

However, an outstanding responsibility to keep Turkey within the European domain rests with Greece. Because, as stated earlier, a Turkey inside Europe constitutes a lesser threat for Greece than a Turkey outflanked and left outside. Moreover, following the Luxembourg Summit, it became clear once more that 'the exclusion of Turkey from the perspective of European unification does not secure even one of Greece's strategic interests'.[82] On the contrary, the geo-strategic position of the two countries interweaved with regard to security and stability in the region; thus, they are weakened if both countries do not share common aims. Therefore, 'relations with Turkey remain the ultimate test of Greece's ability to chart a foreign

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[79] R. J. Gutman, 'Greek Foreign Policy', **Europe**, No. 370, October 1997, p. 16; D. N. Nelson, **Balkan Imbroglia: Politics and Security in Southern Europe**. Boulder: Westview, 1991, p. 97.

[80] Kurop, **op. cit.**, p. 7.

[81] Kohlhase, **op. cit.**, p. 131-132.

[82] T. Psalidopoulos, 'The Greek-Turkish Relations After Luxembourg', **Perceptions**, June 1998, p. 11.

policy that best serves its interests rather than simply inflames old passions', and as Greek Foreign Minister Pangalos said in early 1997, '[the Greeks] must get over the old knee-jerk reaction that if something is bad for Turkey, it is good for us'.[83]

The fundamental interests of both countries lie in peace and cooperation, not confrontation. It is literally absurd to have the sky over the Aegean Sea shadowed by military aircrafts while both countries stand to benefit from developing friendly and good-neighbourly relations. Thus, they have to overcome the memories of past injustices. History is history and there are reasons for everything. But in this day and age, when not just a century but a millennium is about to end, the way to proceed should be forward, not backward.

[83] Kurop, **op. cit.**, p. 7.