

PERSONAL DIPLOMACY AND GREEK FOREIGN POLICY

Murat ÜLGÜL*

ABSTRACT

Personal diplomacy refers to a situation where a nation's top leadership and senior officials actively involve themselves in the diplomatic efforts of their government and directly communicate with other countries' leadership and senior officials. Despite its highly personalized domestic political system, the literature lacks an analysis of Greek foreign policy in terms of personal diplomacy and this study aims to be a first step in this direction. After providing a conceptual analysis of this concept which has started to become popular in the discipline of international relations, the study will show how personal diplomacy was successfully adopted by Venizelos towards the Turkish government in the interwar period and why this practice failed in successive decades despite repeated attempts to solve problems with Turkey through leadership communication. The hypothesis of the study is that personal diplomacy is a necessary but not sufficient element for sincere dialogue between Greece and Turkey, yet it may constitute an effective method to overcome misunderstandings between the parties.

Keywords: Greek Foreign Policy, Greek-Turkish Relations, Individual-Level Analysis, Personal Diplomacy, Political Leadership.

* Assoc. Prof. Dr., Karadeniz Technical University, Department of International Relations, Trabzon, ORCID: orcid.org/0000-0003-3846-8971, E-mail: mulgul@ktu.edu.tr



YUNAN DIŐ POLİTİKASINDA KİŐİSEL DİPLOMASİ

ÖZ

KiŐisel diplomasi bir devletin siyasi liderliĐinin ve ũst d¼zey politikacılarının aktif olarak kendilerini h¼k¼metlerinin diplomasi çabalarına dahil etmesini ve diĐer devletlerin siyasi liderliĐi ve ũst d¼zey y¼neticileri ile iletiŐime geçmelerini ifade etmektedir. İleri derecede kiŐiselleŐmiŐ iç siyasi sistemine raĐmen mevcut literat¼r kiŐisel diplomasi bakımından Yunan dıŐ politikasının analizi konusunda eksikliĐe sahiptir ve bu çalıŐma bu doĐrultuda bir ilk adım olma amacındadır. Bu çalıŐmada, Uluslararası iliŐkiler disiplininde pop¼ler olmaya baŐlayan bu olgunun kavramsal analizi saĐlandıktan sonra çalıŐma, kiŐisel diplomasinin iki savaŐ arası dönemde Venizelos tarafından T¼rk h¼k¼metine y¼nelik nasıl baŐarılı bir Őekilde uygulandıĐı ve ilerleyen on yıllarda tekrarlanan denemelere raĐmen T¼rkiye ile sorunları liderlik etkileŐimi yoluyla ç¼zme giriŐiminin neden baŐarısız olduĐu ortaya konulacaktır. ÇalıŐmanın hipotezi Yunanistan ve T¼rkiye arasında samimi bir diyalog için kiŐisel diplomasinin gerekli ama yetersiz bir olgu olduĐu, bununla birlikte taraflar arasında anlaşmazlıkların ũstesinden gelmede etkili bir metot oluŐturabileceĐidir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Birey-D¼zeyi Analizi, KiŐisel Diplomasi, Siyasi Liderlik, Yunan DıŐ Politikası, Yunan-T¼rk İliŐkileri.

Introduction

After being largely overlooked for decades, a focus on individuals has increasingly become prominent in the discipline of international relations as many researchers and analysts use political leaders' ideologies, personalities, past experiences and even mental health as independent variables to analyze interstate relations.¹ Today it is not uncommon to define a political regime, a war, or a country's grand strategy with a leader's name – for example, Erdoğan's Turkey, Putin's war in Ukraine, or Trumpism. Accordingly,

¹ For some examples see, Nassir Ghaemi, *A First-Rate Madness: Uncovering the Links between Leadership and Mental Illness*, Penguin Books, New York 2011; Todd Hall and Keren Yarhi-Milo, "The Personal Touch: Leaders' Impressions, Costly Signaling, and Assessments of Sincerity in International Affairs", *International Studies Quarterly*, Volume 56, Number 3, 2012, p. 560-573; Archie Brown, *The Human Factor: Gorbachev, Reagan, and Thatcher, and the End of the Cold War*, Oxford University Press, New York 2020.

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personal diplomacy as an area to study international relations through the (inter-)actions of political personalities has also developed in the literature.² This study aims to contribute to the growing literature by analyzing the effects of personal diplomacy in Greek foreign policy.

Traditionally personal diplomacy is not a foreign concept to the country as Greek decision-makers such as Eleftherios Venizelos, Konstantinos Karamanlis, Andreas Papandreou, Antonis Samaras and many others hold the strings of foreign policy tightly within their grasp as a result of poor institutionalization in domestic policy.³ These leaders shaped the country's foreign policy while infrequently consulting with domestic actors. Some of them relied on personal relationships with foreign leaders to solve problems and protect the country's interests instead of following bureaucratic and institutional methods. Indeed, personalized politics has been a continuous norm in Greek politics. As Duman and Tsarouhas point out, even after the civilianization of Greek politics as a result of the Europeanization process, the old practices of personalized politics, clientelism, authoritarian and hierarchical structures of party organization, and absolute dominance of leaders over parties and parties over civil society have persisted in the country's political system.⁴ In other words, even membership in the European Union (EU) failed to bring "less personalized policies" and "more coalition-building initiatives" in Greek domestic and foreign policies.⁵

Beyond the traditional habits in Greek politics, I argue here that personal diplomacy is an indispensable tool for Greek foreign policy as several foreign policy priorities of this country are located in the Middle East

² Some examples are Philip E. Muehlenbeck, "Kennedy and Toure: A Success in Personal Diplomacy", *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, Volume 19, 2008, p. 69-95; Frank Costigliola, *Roosevelt's Lost Alliances: How Personal Politics Helped Start the Cold War*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 2012; Ian Ostrander and Toby J. Rider, "Presidents Abroad: The Politics of Personal Diplomacy", *Political Research Quarterly*, Volume 72, Number 4, 2019, p. 835-848.

³ P.C. Ioakimidis, "The Model of Foreign Policy-Making in Greece: Personalities and Institutions", (eds.) Stelios Stavridis et al., *The Foreign Policies of the European Union's Mediterranean States and Applicant Countries in the 1990s*, St. Martin's Press, New York 1999, p. 140-170.

⁴ Özkan Duman and Dimitris Tsarouhas, "Civilianization" in Greece versus "Demilitarization" in Turkey: A Comparative Study of Civil-Military Relations and the Impact of the European Union", *Armed Forces and Society*, Volume 32, Number 3, 2006, p. 412.

⁵ Charalambos Tsardanidis and Stelios Stavridis, "The Europeanisation of Greek Foreign Policy: A Critical Appraisal", *Journal of European Integration*, Volume 27, Number 2, 2005, p. 218.

and Eastern Mediterranean regions where the leadership factor is critical because of the presence of strong leaders or cultural factors. Dealing with important regional actors including Turkey, Israel, and Egypt, and even outsider great powers such as the United States, Russia, and China necessitates active diplomatic efforts by political leadership in Greek foreign policy. Based on this argument, this study will first provide a brief conceptual analysis of personal diplomacy by explaining its historical development, the arguments about its advantages and disadvantages for a state's foreign policy, and its contemporary application. The second section will analyze how the Greek leaders used personal diplomacy in the past and the factors behind it. Then the third section will explain why the practice of personal diplomacy is indispensable for Greek foreign policy, how this practice interacts with the Europeanization process, and how contemporary Greek leadership follows personal diplomacy especially, in its relations with Turkey, the focal point of Greek foreign policy. The conclusion will summarize the findings and provide some recommendations about the future of Greek foreign policy.

1. Personal Diplomacy: A Conceptual Analysis

Personal diplomacy has recently become a popular subject in the international relations discipline as the leaders of major great powers have actively involved themselves in diplomatic relations rather than delegating important foreign policy tasks to bureaucratic state officials. When Donald Trump held a behind-closed-doors meeting with Russian leader Vladimir Putin in Helsinki in July 2018 or when he developed a personal relationship with North Korea's authoritarian leader Kim Jong Un, several American commentators pointed out the growing reliance on personal diplomacy as a presidential tactic while highlighting its danger in the hand of an inexperienced president.⁶ His successor Joe Biden, who criticizes almost everything Trump did in foreign policy, also embraced personal diplomacy as he attempted to create a personal connection with the Chinese leader Xi Jinping in what officials called a policy of "strategic empathy" to calm tensions in bilateral relations.⁷ This increasing practice of personal diplomacy

⁶ Tizoc Chavez, "Personal Diplomacy has Long been a Presidential Tactic, But Trump Adds a Twist", *The Conversation*, 23 January 2019, <https://theconversation.com/personal-diplomacy-has-long-been-a-presidential-tactic-but-trump-adds-a-twist-105031>, (07.05.2023).

⁷ Michael Crowley, "'Strategic Empathy': How Biden's Informal Diplomacy Shaped Foreign Relations", *The New York Times*, 5 July 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/05/us/politics/joe-biden-foreign-policy.html>, (07.05.2023); Peter Nicholas, "White House Hopes Biden's Relationship with Xi Can Defuse U.S.-China Tensions", *NBC News*, 15 March 2023, <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/white->

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in American foreign policy is the result of the recognition that the leaders of other major powers also value personal friendships for cooperation and crisis-resolution purposes in international politics as Putin-Erdoğan or Xi-Modi relations demonstrates.⁸

By definition, personal diplomacy refers to a situation where a nation's top leadership and senior officials actively involve themselves in the diplomatic efforts of their government and directly communicate with other countries' leadership and senior officials while also engaging with foreign publics to manage the international environment. In other words, it highlights the importance of the human factor, personal friendships, direct communications, political networks, and soft power in international relations.⁹ In the literature, personal diplomacy is relatedly and interchangeably used with other concepts such as "leadership diplomacy," "summit diplomacy" and "face-to-face diplomacy".¹⁰ Nevertheless, these latter concepts narrow down the personal interactions by focusing on a specific actor, location, and method, respectively. As the Greek case shows, personal diplomacy involves the participation of political figures other than leaders including foreign ministers or top military officers, locations other than summits as happens during a state visit to another country, and methods other than face-to-face meetings such as phone talks or exchange of letters. Contrary to other terms, personal diplomacy also does not exclude the foreign public as a target of diplomatic efforts.

house/white-house-hopes-bidens-relationship-xi-can-diffuse-us-china-tensions-rcna74444, (07.05.2023).

⁸ *Fox News*, "Personal Diplomacy Marks Modi's China Visit amid Warming Ties and Enduring Rivalry", 8 December 2015, <https://www.foxnews.com/world/personal-diplomacy-marks-modis-china-visit-amid-warming-ties-and-enduring-rivalry>, (07.05.2023); Metin Gurcan, "Erdogan's Personalized Diplomacy with Putin May Have Been Point of Sochi Summit", *Al-Monitor*, 30 September 2021, <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/09/erdogans-personalized-diplomacy-putin-may-have-been-point-sochi-summit>, (07.05.2023).

⁹ Hendrik W. Ohnesorge, "Personal Diplomacy", (ed.) B.J.C. McKercher, *The Routledge Handbook of Diplomacy and Statecraft*, Routledge, London 2022, p. 399.

¹⁰ Russell D. Buhite, *Decisions at Yalta: An Appraisal of Summit Diplomacy*, SR Books, Lanham 1988; Marcus Holmes, *Face-to-Face Diplomacy: Social Neuroscience and International Relations*, Cambridge University Press, New York 2018; Ali Faik Demir and Nur Çetinoğlu Harunoğlu, *Soğuk Savaş Sonrasında Türkiye-ABD İlişkilerinde Orta Doğu ve Lider Diplomasisi*, Yeditepe Yayınevi, İstanbul 2023.

Although the effect of individuals on international relations has been neglected for decades in the discipline,¹¹ personal diplomacy has been practiced for centuries. Even in the seventh and eighth centuries, when the technological conditions and security concerns did not allow long-distance trips or far away communications, three kings of England died on the way to Rome when they intended to meet continental leaders and the Pope in order to solve political problems and develop friendly relations.¹² Nevertheless, personal diplomacy owes its effectiveness mainly to the birth of modern international relations. Following catastrophic wars in the last two centuries, the dominant rules and norms in every international system were determined with the gathering of the leaders of great powers as happened with the Vienna Congress of 1814-15, the Paris Peace Conference of 1919, and successive meetings among the American, Soviet and British leaders during the Second World War. To illustrate the importance of personal diplomacy, an interesting hypothetical question is whether or not the Cold War would have started if American President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, who had been involved in a successful relationship with Joseph Stalin during the war, had not died in April 1945 and been replaced by Harry Truman who did not have a similar experience with the Soviet leadership that would help America to understand their concerns.¹³

The growing number of international conferences, organizations, and summits in a globalizing world as well as developments in transportation and communication technologies allowed the political leaders to conduct personal diplomacy more frequently and effectively. Indeed, some personal diplomacy initiatives had groundbreaking effects on political history. The direct meetings between German and French leaders, especially Konrad Adenauer and Charles de Gaulle at the end of the 1950s were critical in diminishing the effects of the bloody history between the two countries and overcoming the deadlocks in the common market and institutionalization efforts in Europe.¹⁴ The Camp David Summit of September 1978 in which Jimmy Carter locked

¹¹ Daniel L. Byman and Kenneth M. Pollack, "Let Us Now Praise Great Men: Bringing the Statesman Back In", *International Security*, Volume 25, Number 4, 2001, p. 108.

¹² Erik Goldstein, "The Origins of Summit Diplomacy", (ed.) David H. Dunn, *Diplomacy at the Highest Level: The Evolution of International Summitry*, Palgrave Macmillan, London 1996, p. 23-24.

¹³ C. L. Sulzberger, "Foreign Affairs: If Roosevelt Had Lived?", *The New York Times*, 12 April 1970, p. 12.

¹⁴ Jeffrey G. Giauque, "Bilateral Summit Diplomacy in Western European and Transatlantic Relations, 1956-1963", *European History Quarterly*, Volume 31, Number 3, 2001, p. 427-445.

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himself in a presidential retreat with Israel's Menachem Begin and Egypt's Anwar Sadat for thirteen days solved a critical impasse in the Middle East since the first Arab-Israeli War in 1948. It was unsuccessfully repeated by Bill Clinton two decades later in trying to find a solution for the Palestine conflict as well.¹⁵ Most importantly, personal dialogue and friendship between American presidents Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush and Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev played an important role in the peaceful end of the Cold War.¹⁶ However, Bush's other attempt to conduct personal diplomacy with Turkish President Turgut Özal during the Gulf War resulted in difficulties for Turkish foreign policy which sowed the seeds for the contemporary challenges in bilateral relations.¹⁷

Despite the frequent application of personal diplomacy by state leaders and its historical outcomes, there are two important discussions in the literature about this concept. One is related to the ontology of international relations: Is it worth studying individuals? Traditional approaches in the discipline, such as realism and liberalism, preferred to focus on either states or international systems as levels of analysis mainly because individuals are regarded as irrational, unpredictable, and difficult to study in a positivist sense.¹⁸ This ignorance lasted until the 1980s when some scholars started analyzing how leadership traits affect decision-making processes and state behaviors.¹⁹ In the 2000s, Byman and Pollack called on the discipline to give more attention to individuals, arguing that "the goals, abilities, and foibles of individuals are crucial to the intentions, capabilities, and strategies of a state"²⁰ while academic journals such as *Political Psychology* and *Foreign Policy Analysis* contributed to the growing interest on personal characteristics of state leaders and politicians. With the rising number of strong and charismatic leaders such as Vladimir Putin, Barack Obama, Angela Merkel,

¹⁵ Holmes, *op.cit.*, p. 156-200.

¹⁶ Svetlana Savranskaya and Thomas S. Blanton, *The Last Superpower Summits: Gorbachev, Reagan, and Bush - Conversations that Ended the Cold War*, Central European University Press, New York 2020.

¹⁷ Murat Yetkin, *İyi Günler Bay Başkan: Körfez Savaşı'nda Özal-Bush Görüşmeleri*, Doğan Kitap, İstanbul 2022.

¹⁸ Robert A. Isaak, "The Individual in International Politics: Solving the Level-of-Analysis Problem", *Polity*, Volume 7, Number 2, 1974, p. 266.

¹⁹ Margaret G. Hermann, "Explaining Foreign Policy Behavior Using the Personal Characteristics of Political Leaders", *International Studies Quarterly*, Volume 24, Number 1, 1980, p. 7-46.

²⁰ Byman and Pollack, *op.cit.*, p. 109.

Xi Jinping, Silvio Berlusconi, and Lula da Silva in major world capitals since then, it became impossible for the discipline to push individuals aside.

The other discussion revolves around the benefits of personal diplomacy for state interests. According to the traditional bureaucratic perspective, when political leaders personally interfere in the diplomatic processes, there may be harmful consequences for the state interests. First, the foreign powers may benefit from the information and personality weaknesses of politicians and may easily deceive them in order to follow policies against the state interests. That was the concern of the American foreign policy establishment when Donald Trump personalized the decision-making process and dealt with important foreign policy matters directly with authoritarian foreign leaders.²¹ Even when a political leader has enough political experience and information on foreign policy issues, personal diplomacy has a risk of increasing the effects of ideological tendencies, personal ambitions, and individual interests on state policies. When a group of retired Turkish ambassadors criticized the growing practice of personal diplomacy in 2010, what they had in mind was Erdoğan's religious ideology and his objective to turn Turkey into a global power which they found as subjective and irrational, respectively.²² To avoid these problems, the bureaucratic approach maintains, diplomacy must be left within the hands of professional diplomats who are believed to be more educated in foreign policy matters, more rational in decision-making process, and less influenced by ideological motivations, personal objectives, and domestic political concerns than state leaders and politicians.²³

Proponents of personal diplomacy, on the other hand, maintain that direct contact among political and high-level officials has significant advantages that traditional bureaucracy lacks. First, personal diplomacy provides "sincerity judgments" as political leaders can understand the trustworthiness of other leaders through facial expressions, body language, and even unconscious movements in direct meetings.²⁴ George W. Bush most famously claims that he decided to cooperate with Putin after a meeting in

²¹ Richard Fontaine, "A Troubling Pattern of Personal Diplomacy", *The Atlantic*, 29 December 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2018/12/trumps-pattern-personalized-diplomacy-upended-syria/579145/>, (13.05.2023).

²² Damla Aras, "Turkey's Ambassadors vs. Erdoğan", *Middle East Quarterly*, Volume 18, Number 1, 2011, p. 47-57.

²³ Demir and Çetinoğlu Harunoğlu, *op.cit.*, p. 49-51.

²⁴ Hall and Yarhi-Milo, *op.cit.*, p. 560-561.

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which he looked the Russian leader in the eye and got “a sense of his soul”.²⁵ Second, direct personal communications between leaders can help to diminish tensions between countries which have problematic relations. After the Cuba crisis, the United States and Russia established a hotline so that miscalculations, accidents, and misunderstandings between the countries could be avoided through direct and fast contact between the leaders.²⁶ Finally, it is argued that political leaders can accomplish more through personal diplomacy rather than time-consuming efforts of diplomats who do not have real authority and stick with traditional and inflexible mindsets. This belief was what convinced Reagan to start a personal relationship with Gorbachev after his early traditional and confrontational presidency and sow the seeds of the peaceful end of the Cold War.²⁷

These discussions are not new in the literature. Graham Allison’s famous book, *Essence of Decision*, discusses the nexus between personal leadership, organizational politics, and foreign policy bureaucracy through three decision-making models using the case of the Cuban Missile Crisis. Among these models, the *Organizational Process Model* assumes that foreign policy decisions are taken as a result of organizational behaviors and standard administrative procedures; therefore, the leader does not have a determinative effect on state actions. *The Bureaucratic Politics Model* regards the foreign policy decisions to be the result of a bargaining process among several actors within the state bureaucracy. The preferences of political leadership are critical in this model but other actors such as ministers, advisers and/or military officers are influential as well. Opponents of personal diplomacy mainly argue that healthy and effective foreign policy decisions are taken with this kind of dialogue and bargaining within the state machinery. Finally, the *Rational Actor Model* focuses on the cost-benefit calculations of decision-makers and in general avoids the ideological aspect of personal politics.²⁸ As Allison’s models focused more on rationality, bureaucratic process and organizational structure, the *Leader-Oriented Decision-Making Model* filled the gap in the literature by analyzing beliefs and values, political experiences, unique characteristics, informational capacities, intellectual abilities and the

²⁵ George W. Bush, *Decision Points*, Crown Publishers, New York 2010, p. 196.

²⁶ History, “Hotline Established Between Washington and Moscow”, 27 August 2019, <https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/hotline-established-between-washington-and-moscow>, (14.05.2023).

²⁷ Ronald Reagan, *Ronald Reagan: An American Life*, Hutchison, London 1990, p. 634.

²⁸ Graham T. Allison, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis*, Little Brown, Boston 1971.

personal decision-making styles of political leaders.²⁹ Both proponents of personal diplomacy and personal diplomacy researchers share the belief that leaders and individuals matter when it comes to foreign policy decisions.

2. Personal Diplomacy in the History of Greek Foreign Policy

Although one cannot claim institutional continuity between historical Greek states and modern Greece, it is interesting to note how personal diplomacy was integrated into Greek diplomacy even before the development of transportation and telecommunication technologies. For example, in the absence of an established bureaucracy, the ancient Greek city-states mainly relied on direct oral exchange and contact between men for the conduct of diplomacy in war and peace. Indeed, the choice of individuals to give political messages to the other actors was a serious task as it reflected the seriousness of the intentions in diplomacy.³⁰ The Byzantine Empire, on the other hand, developed a quite complex bureaucratic system that relied on specialization, division of authority, and balance of power among different administrative units.³¹ Nevertheless, the practice of personal diplomacy survived especially within the relations of the Ottoman Empire.³² Indeed, some claims that the failure of Constantine XI Palaiologos, who mainly relied on his personal charisma and connections with influential foreigners to accomplish his foreign policy objectives, to develop similar diplomatic connections with the Ottoman Grand Vizier Candarli Halil Pasha diminished his ability to influence Ottoman policies and led to the collapse of the empire in 1453.³³

The practice of personal diplomacy was rare until the modern period and the most prominent Greek politician linked with personal diplomacy is Eleftherios Venizelos who served as Prime Minister in 1910-15, 1917-20, and

²⁹ Bülent Şener, "Dış Politikada Kriz Yönetimi ve Bir Kriz Yönetimi Stratejisi Olarak Zorlayıcı Diplomasi", (eds.) Ayça Emiñoğlu and Murat Ülgül, *Uluslararası Güvenliğe Giriş*, Nobel, Ankara 2021, p. 363-364.

³⁰ Sir Frank Adcock and D.J. Mosley, *Diplomacy in Ancient Greece*, St. Martin's Press, New York 1975, p. 152-169.

³¹ Judith Herrin, *Byzantium: The Surprising Life of a Medieval Empire*, Princeton University Press, New Jersey 2008, p. 174.

³² Baki Tezcan, *The Second Ottoman Empire: Political and Social Transformation in the Early Modern World*, Cambridge University Press, New York 2010, p. 87.

³³ Adam William Hellebuyck, *Foreign Relations and the End of Byzantium: The Use of Personal Diplomacy during the Reign of Constantine XI Palaiologos (1448-1453)*, University of Michigan Department of History, Honors Bachelor Thesis, Adviser: Professor Rudi Lindner, Michigan 2006, p. 98.

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1928-32, brief short services excluded. As a politician, Venizelos personally and ambitiously took foreign policy into his own hands to accomplish national policy objectives. As Smith observed, he “often acted as his own foreign minister by throwing himself into the day-to-day hustle of negotiation” and “made himself the main instrument of his own diplomacy”.³⁴ What is interesting in Venizelos’ case is that although he was not inclined to take consultation in the decision-making process, he used personal diplomacy as a tool in a quite pragmatic way with high ideological flexibility. This can be seen in his attempts to use personal diplomacy both for realizing Greece’s hegemonic ambitions during the peace conferences after the Great War and in the opposite way, for establishing a regional peace bloc with neighboring countries at the beginning of the 1930s.

Venizelos’ power in personal diplomacy was based on his persuasiveness. “When the two of us are alone and we disagree, Venizelos never convinces me! If there are three of us, I begin to waver. The moment he addresses several people, at cabinet meetings for instance, it often happens that I am carried away too, along with the others”, a Greek diplomat said about Venizelos.³⁵ The best place to test this persuasive power was undoubtedly the Paris Peace Conference of 1919 and the following meetings regarding the Ottoman question. Addressing the leaders of major powers in Paris, Venizelos tried to convince them why Greece should own the territory of Asia Minor, and with the help of British Prime Minister Lloyd George, who was also a believer in personal diplomacy, he managed to land Greek troops in İzmir in May 1919. The questioning of Greek motivations and actions following the landing, especially by French leader Georges Clemenceau,³⁶ proves the success of Venizelos’ personal diplomacy and persuasive power not only in cabinet meetings or among his people but also among foreign leaders who had diverse national interests. As Macmillan puts it, without Venizelos “Greece would never have won what it did at the conference table; without him, it would not have tried to swallow so much of Asia Minor,” which

³⁴ Michael Llewellyn Smith, “ ‘Venizelos’ Diplomacy, 1910-1923: From Balkan Alliance to Greek-Turkish Settlement”, (ed.) Paschalis M. Kitromilides, *Eleftherios Venizelos: The Trials of Statesmanship*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh 2006, p. 137.

³⁵ Quoted from Smith, *ibid.*, p. 175.

³⁶ A. Suat Bilge, *Büyük Düş: Türk-Yunan Siyasi İlişkileri*, 21. Yüzyıl Yayınları, Ankara 2000, p. 39-66.

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brought a tragedy for Greece by triggering the Turks' nationalist sentiments and led to the defeat of Greek armies in 1922.³⁷

Despite the tragedy, Venizelos did not leave the practice of personal diplomacy. Instead, he learned to use it for building peace. After coming to power in 1928, Venizelos sent a letter to Turkish Prime Minister İsmet İnönü, stating that Greece did not have any territorial desire on Turkish lands and revealing his intention to sign a friendship, arbitration, and non-aggression pact with its eastern neighbor. Although İnönü replied to the letter positively,³⁸ existing postwar problems between the two countries, the fresh memory of the war, and domestic opposition to peace in both countries did not produce an immediate result. The frozen situation was solved with another action of personal diplomacy, Venizelos' visit to Ankara on September 27-31, 1930. The visit's purpose was to eliminate psychological barriers between the two nations when the general security situation in Europe deteriorated and both countries were concerned about the revisionist purposes of Italy and Bulgaria. During his time in Turkey, Venizelos was not only able to acquire direct information on Atatürk's intentions about the bilateral relations - he had known İsmet İnönü from the Lausanne Conference of 1922-23, he also succeeded in erasing the doubts of a great number of Turkish politicians and the Turkish public about his sincerity.³⁹ Venizelos also used his persuasive power to counter the domestic opposition to Greek-Turkish reconciliation and kept supporting the growing bilateral relations when he was in opposition in Greece after 1932.⁴⁰ Without Venizelos-Atatürk personal diplomacy, two rival countries would not have started a golden period in bilateral relations.

Although Venizelos proved the utility of personal diplomacy in Greek foreign policy, it could not have been efficiently used in the following decades. One problem was the growing distrust in diplomacy to protect Greek national security interests. As the Cyprus and Aegean issues dominated the Greek foreign policy agenda starting in the mid-1950s, successive Greek governments reached a consensus that Turkey was pursuing revisionist objectives threatening Greek sovereignty in the region while major powers,

³⁷ Margaret Macmillan, *Paris 1919: Six Months That Changed the World*, Random House, New York 2002, p. 348.

³⁸ Enis Tulça, *Atatürk-Venizelos ve Bir Diplomat: Enis Bey*, Simurg, İstanbul 2015, p. 17-18.

³⁹ For detailed information on this visit, see Temuçin Faik Ertan and Bahattin Demirtaş, *Türkiye'yi Ziyaret Eden Yabancı Devlet Adamlarının Ankara Günleri (1923-1960)*, Koç Üniversitesi Yayınları, İstanbul 2020, p. 46-61.

⁴⁰ Tulça, *op.cit.*, p. 49, 52.

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the United States and the Soviet Union, supported Ankara in this confrontation because of the strategic geopolitical importance of Turkey in Cold War politics. In this picture, Turkey's emphasis on a negotiated solution of differences through leadership meetings, as well as the Western support of these kinds of initiatives, was regarded as a trap by the Greeks to convince its leaders to give up established sovereignty rights. This is why Greek leaders kept rejecting American recommendations for a "Camp David" approach to solving Greek-Turkish differences through summit diplomacy among leaders.⁴¹

Another problem is related to the most significant weakness of personal diplomacy itself. The success of personal diplomacy depends on strong and/or long-term leadership as the Venizelos-Atatürk relationship demonstrated. For example, an overlooked effort of personal diplomacy took place at the end of the 1960s between Greek and Turkish foreign ministers Panagiotis Pipinellis and İhsan Sabri Çağlayangil. When the military dictatorship in Greece wanted to appoint Pipinellis as foreign minister, he first demanded to talk with his Turkish counterpart to see if there was any real chance to fix broken bilateral relations, and after Çağlayangil accepted to continue working together, he took the job. Both foreign ministers worked in harmony despite the military influence in both countries and they even organized a secret meeting to decide on a formula to force the Cypriot leaders for peace. Nevertheless, Pipinellis' sudden death in 1970 prevented these plans from coming into force⁴² and political instabilities in both countries afterward paved the way for military confrontation in Cyprus in 1974.

The next failed attempt at personal diplomacy took place in the 1980s between Andreas Papandreou and Turgut Özal. When Özal came to power in 1983, his main priority was to end the military tutelage in the country which hung like the "sword of Damocles" over his administration. He believed that an important reason for the military tutelage was the internal and external security problems that kept the military as a necessary political actor in the country. He demanded "ten years of peace" from the foreign policy bureaucracy so that his regime would succeed in political, social, and

⁴¹ Van Coufoudakis, "Greek-Turkish Relations, 1973-1983: The View from Athens", *International Security*, Volume 9, Number 4, 1985, p. 202-203, 208.

⁴² Tanju Cılızoğlu, "*Kader Bizi Una Değil, Üne İtti*": *Çağlayangil'in Anıları*, Bilgi Yayınevi, Ankara 2018, p. 342-347.

economic reforms and strengthen the civilian rule.⁴³ An important component of this strategy was Greece, and he offered a peace and friendship agreement and increasing economic ties with Athens as soon as he came to power. He also proposed a leadership meeting that would lead to further dialogue between the countries. Yet, Papandreou rejected these proposals for a long time as his foreign policy strategy focused on the “threat from the East” and interpreted Özal’s proposals as a sinister attempt to make a fool of Greek politicians by getting them to accept Ankara’s objective of EU Membership.⁴⁴ Papandreou’s resistance ended with the leadership meetings called the “Davos spirit” in 1988; yet, the process unsuccessfully expired soon after as Papandreou faced domestic opposition on the issue and lost power in the election of June 1989.⁴⁵ When Papandreou came back to power in October 1993, on the other hand, he couldn’t find a Turkish counterpart to re-initiate personal diplomacy, if he had intended, as Özal had passed away a couple of months before and short-term coalition governments dominated Turkish politics for the rest of the decade. The abrupt changes of political figures, especially when an issue is deeply politicized, have been a major obstacle for effective and successful personal diplomacy.

Related to this episode, the final problem is the impression that Greek politicians used personal diplomacy as a tactic for limited purposes rather than as a part of a grand strategy. For example, the rapprochement between Adnan Menderes and Konstantin Karamanlis in 1959, the above-mentioned Pipinellis-Çağlayangil contacts, the “Montreux spirit” between Turkish leaders and Karamanlis in 1978-1981, the Davos spirit of 1988, and the dialogue process between Greek and Turkish foreign ministers, Yorgo Papandreou and İsmail Cem, in 1999-2002 all took place following a political and/or military confrontation between the two countries over the Aegean issues or Cyprus. Unlike Venizelos who acted with long-term plans and a certain level of determination, these personal diplomacy initiatives were followed as a crisis-averting tactic, and that is why they were not adopted by succeeding administrations once the tensions were over. All in all, despite its common usage, personal diplomacy remained an inefficient tool in Greece’s foreign policy strategy.

⁴³ Hüner Tuncer, *Özal’ın Dış Politikası (1983-1989)*, Kaynak Yayınları, İstanbul 2015, p. 32-34.

⁴⁴ Andreas Politakis, *Al Beyaz Mavi Beyaz*, Milliyet Yayınları, İstanbul 1988.

⁴⁵ For the Davos spirit, see Alexis Heraclides, *The Greek-Turkish Conflict in the Aegean: Imagined Enemies*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York 2010, p. 123-126.

3. Personal Diplomacy as Necessity

Inefficient does not mean unnecessary. Athens today still needs to apply personal diplomacy in its foreign policy for two reasons, one internal and one external. The internal reason is that personalism is at the core of the Greek political system. The last six decades of Greek politics have been dominated by a small number of political families such as Karamanlis, Papandreu, and Mitsotakis and this personalistic politics has been strengthened by nepotistic public appointments shaped by personalized trust and clientelism. As a result, Greek Prime Ministers are likely to be more powerful than their counterparts in the West and their relatively long periods of tenure simply proves this situation. Although long tenures and socialization processes within important political families provide a certain level of stability, which Greece needed following the turbulent decades after the Second World War, it also has a risk of creating inflexible and persistent beliefs and policy behaviors which can be transformed only through the direct interaction with political leaders. Another important result of this personalized and hierarchical system is that the bureaucrats and civil servants working in it are “transformed into mere observers of the policy process without a direct stake in it” while individual ministers, mandated by the political leaders, enjoy a “considerable degree of operational independence”.⁴⁶ This domestic picture also makes personal diplomacy with political leaders and/or foreign ministers the most realistic option for those foreign countries wanting to interact with Greece. In fact, in spite of stronger and more diverse ties in recent decades, alternative potential actors, such as economic and trade actors or non-governmental organizations, so far have not efficiently contributed to the conflict-resolution process in Greek-Turkish relations⁴⁷ due mainly to the hierarchical and leader-centered political system in both countries.

The external reason is that today an increasing number of countries both among Greece’s neighbors as well as great powers are following personal diplomacy, and Greek decision-makers have to establish personal connections with the leaders of these countries in order to solve political crises and/or develop international cooperation. Turkey is surely the main example

⁴⁶ Kevin Featherstone and Dimitris Papadimitriou, *Prime Ministers in Greece: The Paradox of Power*, Oxford University Press, New York 2015, p. 17, 32.

⁴⁷ Dimitris Tsarouhas and Nüve Yazgan, “Trade, Non-State Actors and Conflict: Evidence from Greece and Turkey”, *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, Volume 31, Number 3-4, 2018, p. 291-313.

here. The preferences and personal characteristics of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, first as Prime Minister and then president, shaped the main direction of Turkish foreign policy in the last two decades, and with his recent reelection in May 2023, Erdoğan is guaranteed to lead the country for five more years with increasing power and influence. A personalistic and hierarchical decision-making process is one of the most essential features in Erdoğan's governance style in which he prefers direct contact with foreign leaders by bypassing foreign policy bureaucracy and other actors including parliaments.⁴⁸ As explained in another article, personal diplomacy is "most effective in crisis periods, when there is dominant leadership, and when the political leader is confident about his/her ability to shape policies". In recent years, Erdoğan's successful personal diplomacy with Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin was the result of the existence of these conditions⁴⁹ and the Turkish President would follow the same diplomatic process with Greek leadership once Athens is open to the process. Therefore, if Greek leaders want to solve its long-term problems with Turkey on Cyprus, the Aegean Sea, and East Mediterranean issues, personal diplomacy seems the easiest and most effective strategy.

Greek leaders were indeed aware of this necessity and conducted personal diplomacy with the Turkish government in recent years albeit without any success. In December 2017, for example, Erdoğan visited Athens which raised hopes in Greece for fixing bilateral relations as the occasion was the first presidential visit from Turkey in 65 years. Yet, the event turned into a diplomatic fiasco when the Turkish leader used a confrontational rhetoric against his host, the Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras, by criticizing the Greek government for not taking care of the Ottoman sites and providing proper worship services to the Muslims in the country. During the visit, Erdoğan also blamed the Greeks and Greek Cypriots for the failure of the Cyprus talks while demanding the handover of eight Turkish officers who escaped to Greece after the 2016 failed coup attempt.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ For Erdoğan's personal influence in foreign policy and personal diplomacy initiatives, see Aylın Ş. Görener and Meltem Ş. Ucal, "The Personality and Leadership Style of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan: Implications for Turkish Foreign Policy", *Turkish Studies*, Volume 12, Number 3, 2011, p. 357-381; Şuay Nilhan Açıklan, *Türk-Alman İlişkilerinde Lider Diplomasisi*, Nobel, Ankara 2021; Ali Balcı and İbrahim Efe, "Exogenous Dynamics and Leadership Traits: A Study of Change in the Personality Traits of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan", *All Azimuth*, Volume 10, Number 2, 2021, p. 149-164.

⁴⁹ Murat Ülgül, "Erdoğan's Personal Diplomacy and Turkish Foreign Policy", *Insight Turkey*, Volume 21, Number 4, 2019, p. 161-182.

⁵⁰ Kostas Ifantis, "Greece's Strategy and Perceptions Towards Turkey: The End of Consensus and the Return of History?", *Uluslararası İlişkiler*, Volume 15, Number 58, 2018, p. 95-96.

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At the beginning of 2019, Tsipras visited Turkey in return. Although this visit was not as negative as Erdoğan's, it was also not a success when Tsipras' declared hope for the reopening of the Halki theological school for Orthodox Christians in Istanbul did not materialize while Erdoğan's demands for reciprocal steps for the rights of Muslims in Greece as well as the improvement of Turkey's EU accession process and the handover of Turkish officers were not responded positively to by Athens.⁵¹ Despite these failures, Tsipras' successor Kyriakos Mitsotakis continued personal diplomacy with Erdoğan as well. The meeting between the two leaders during the NATO summit in London in December 2019 indeed paved the way for political consultations and security discussions in the following months. However, Greece's attempts to build ties with Arab countries that had problematic relations with Ankara as well as its defense cooperation with the United States left Ankara suspicious that Greece was following a policy of encirclement and containment. During this period, Athens also continued its traditional policy of using the EU to punish Turkey, especially by pressuring for economic sanctions and arms sales restrictions, which rendered personal diplomacy with Ankara useless and ineffective.⁵²

The problem here then is not the practice of personal diplomacy but how both sides apply it. To begin with, the process lacks sincerity and good intentions. The leaders of both countries enter into personal dialogue mainly to diminish the level of tensions at best or address the mood of domestic public opinion/concerns rather than solving bilateral problems. The leadership of both countries did not show the same level of resolution to improve relations as Venizelos and Atatürk who spent considerable effort not only to understand each other but also to convince their public for the benefit of peaceful Greek-Turkish relations in the region. The solution to the name dispute between Greece and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) through personal diplomacy between Tsipras and Zoran Zaev in the same period reflects that when there is a will, decisive leaders can find common ground and show political courage in making difficult compromises despite domestic opposition on the matter.⁵³

⁵¹ Carlotta Gall, "In a First, Greek Premier Visits Shuttered Seminary in Turkey", *The New York Times*, 6 February 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/06/world/europe/greece-tsipras-halki-seminary.html>, (01.06.2023).

⁵² *International Crisis Group*, "Turkey-Greece: From Maritime Brinkmanship to Dialogue", Europe Report Number 263, 31 May 2021, p. 18-22.

⁵³ Amanda Sloat, "Diplomacy Triumphs: Greece and Macedonia to Resolve Name Dispute", *Brookings*, 12 June 2018, [https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-](https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2018/06/12/diplomacy-triumphs-greece-and-macedonia-to-resolve-name-dispute/)

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Related to this, the other problem is the premature visibility of personal diplomacy. As the problems in Greek-Turkish relations are sensitive subjects for both countries' populations, there are risks of high expectations and nationalist backlash when personal diplomacy is conducted publicly before the formation of certain levels of mutual trust and understanding between the parties. Especially if the political leaders feel insecure about their power in domestic politics, which is the case in Greek and Turkish politics in recent years, premature personal diplomacy will deteriorate the bilateral relations as these initiatives would be targeted by domestic opposition, political leaders then back off their early intentions and promises while this retreat would be understood as the violation of commitment by the other side. In addition to the political will, the success of the Venizelos-Atatürk diplomacy also lies in early secrecy, refrainment from sudden moves, and timely inclusion of the public in the diplomatic process.

In this regard, a two-pronged strategy may be necessary for a successful application of personal diplomacy in Greek foreign policy. If these initiatives are followed to solve crises, the hierarchical decision-making style and limited participation in diplomacy may be quite helpful for creating mutual understanding between the parties and preventing domestic repercussions. Once trust is established, civil society can be included in the process with careful steps, yet political leaders must have the will to back diplomatic rapprochement even if it is challenged by domestic opposition. This is where Venizelos succeeded in starting the golden years in Greek-Turkish relations between 1930 and 1955 but his successors failed to implement in their personal diplomacy steps. As mentioned, leadership diplomacy is most effective in crisis periods. Nevertheless, if Greek leaders desire to channel conflict resolution into permanent dialogue and partnership, it is necessary to diversify political contacts, especially with the help of civil society organizations, the press, academia, and other societal actors. Otherwise, the nature of relations would be dependent on the political leaders and once these leaders or their political preferences change, the friendly relations may end as well.

chaos/2018/06/12/diplomacy-triumphs-greece-and-macedonia-resolve-name-dispute/
(02.06.2023).

Conclusion

There is growing attention to the phenomenon of personal diplomacy in the international relations literature. Despite the importance of the human factor in the political realm, the dominant positivist approach has led the discipline to ignore individuals for the sake of state- and system-level variables. Nevertheless, the effect of strong and influential leaders in global affairs and their inclination to avoid bureaucracy in shaping state policies recently turned the focus to how personal characteristics, preferences, and ideologies affect foreign policies and interstate relations. With the benefits of developments in transportation and technology, political leaders also started interacting more frequently and regularly, which developed a new area called personal diplomacy in diplomatic transactions. Despite its highly personalized domestic political system, however, the literature lacks a study focusing on the practice of personal diplomacy in contemporary Greek foreign policy. This study aims to take a first step in this direction.

When analyzing personal diplomacy in Greek foreign policy, the most critical name is Eleftherios Venizelos who used his personal relationships with foreign leaders both for hegemonic purposes during and after the First World War and for cooperation-building purposes in the 1930s. Venizelos' successful personal diplomacy indeed initiated a now-unimaginable regional peace with Turkey for two and a half decades. His successors too adopted the practice of personal diplomacy but the growing distrust in diplomacy in Greek foreign policy, the limited and pragmatic worldview of Greek leaders, as well as the lack of determined politicians, prevented successful personal diplomacy initiatives. Nevertheless, because of the continuance of personalized politics in Greece as well as the presence of highly influential leaders in regional and global politics, personal diplomacy is a necessity for Greek politicians. As Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan is known for his reliance on personal ties with foreign leaders, Greek leaders can benefit from the practice of personal diplomacy to fix stagnant problems with Ankara through leadership dialogue. This would build the necessary trust and commitment between the conflicting parties. Once mutual trust is established through personal diplomacy, Greek leaders should extend the political dialogue through the participation of other actors including parliaments, bureaucracy, civil society, and the public. Therefore, personal diplomacy should not be used only as an end-stage strategy to diminish political tensions but as a pathway for more comprehensive, multidimensional, and lasting diplomatic relations.

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