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Kostas IFANTIS

Assoc. Prof. Dr., Department of International Relations, Kadir Has University &
Panteion University

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E-mail : bilgi@uidergisi.com.tr

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Greece's Strategy and Perceptions towards Turkey: The End of Consensus and the Return of History?

Kostas IFANTIS

*Associate Professor, Department of International Relations, Kadir Has University, Istanbul,
Turkey and Panteion University, Athens, Greece.*

E-mail: konstantinos.ifantis@khas.edu.tr

ABSTRACT

The paper focuses on the impact of the crisis on the Greek public debate on, perception of, and strategy towards Turkey. The analysis is placed in the context of a strategic consensus that was ruptured during the crisis and the lack of bipartisanship on the country's security preferences. Although Athens and Ankara have enjoyed an unusually long period of calm waters in the Aegean from 1999 to 2016, the last two years have produced the familiar aggressive rhetoric and mutual mistrust. With the bilateral issues intact, the traditional inertia on both sides can easily turn into heightened tensions with the risk of miscalculation given the proximity of military hardware being hardly insignificant. The paper also presents some of the findings of a research conducted by the two guest editors of this special issue on the Greek elites' perceptions of Turkey in the midst of the crisis.

Keywords: Greek Foreign Policy, Turkey, Elite's Perceptions, Aegean Security

Yunanistan'ın Türkiye Stratejisi ve Algısı: Uzlaşmanın Sonu ve Tarihe Dönüş?

ÖZET

Bu makale, Yunan kamuoyunda ortaya çıkan krizin Türkiye'ye yönelik algı ve stratejiler üzerindeki etkisine odaklanmaktadır. Analiz, krizin ortadan kaldırdığı stratejik fikir birliği ve ülkenin güvenlik konularına yönelik tarafsız bakış açısının ortaya konulamamasının yarattığı etkiler üzerinden yapılmıştır. Atina ve Ankara, her ne kadar Ege Denizi konusunda 1999'dan 2016'ya kadar alışılmadık bir şekilde sakin ilişkiler yürütmüş olsalar da, son iki yılda karşılaştığımız saldırgan söylem ve karşılıklı güvensizlik bilindik gelişmelerdir. İkili ilişkiler zarar görmemiş olsa da, her iki tarafa da hâkim olan geleneksel durum, askeri donanımın benzerliği nedeniyle yanlış anlama riskine bağlı olarak kolaylıkla bir gerilime dönüşebilir. Çalışma aynı zamanda bu özel sayının iki misafir editörü tarafından kriz döneminde Yunan elitinin sahip olduğu Türkiye algısını anlamaya yönelik olarak yürütülmüş bir araştırmanın önemli bulgularını da içermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Yunan Dış politikası, Türkiye, Elit Algısı, Ege Denizi'nin Güvenliği

Introduction

There is no doubt that the 1943 assessment and warning about partisanship in foreign policy by Walter Lippmann is still relevant: The divisive partisanship is above all “a danger to the Republic... For when a people is divided within itself about the conduct of its foreign relations, it is unable to agree on the determination of its true interest.... The spectacle of... (a)... nation which does not know its own mind is as humiliating as it is dangerous.”¹ In the case of Greece, the post-1974 era brought about an end to the bitter partisanship of the past and gave way to a broad consensus on foreign policy that was to last for the next four or so decades.

After WWII, Greek foreign policy lurched incoherently between stark alternatives. The Right bandwagon with the West while the Left viewed this as little more than capitulation to the interests of American imperialism. Constantine Karamanlis embraced the European idea, investing in the institutionalizing European cooperation that would ease the costs of Greece’s modernizing effort and engagement with the world. One of Karamanlis’s greatest achievements was overcoming this political divide and steering Greece toward a new era of bipartisanship. With the dictatorship’s trauma and deteriorating relations with Turkey as a backdrop, Karamanlis laid the foundations for a broad coalition behind Greece’s liberal European orientation. This course entailed a commitment to both liberal democracy and a foreign policy less exceptional within the European integration context. This domestic compact, although weakened by populist political struggles in the 1970s and 1980s finally emerged as the dominant paradigm. The steadiness of bipartisan cooperation on foreign policy was the product not just of strategic necessity but also of changes in the nation’s political landscape. Relative economic growth eased the socioeconomic divides of the post-WWII era, closing the ideological distance between the liberal Right and the social-democratic Left and making it easier to fashion a consensus behind the western liberal paradigm. Prosperity and affluence helped nurture Greece’s political centre, which served as the foundation for growth and development, although major developmental deficits were not addressed.

The financial crisis that engulfed Greece in 2009 ended certainties and established truths and shattered the post-1974 consensus. The field of foreign and security policy did not escape the fractures that crippled the political process and proclaimed a populist voluntarism and an anti-systemic discourse as the solutions to the plights of the Greek people inflicted by foreign foes and their domestic servants. And although the crisis found the Greek-Turkish relations enjoying one of the longest periods of tranquillity, it took just a couple of incidents to return to the much more familiar dramas in the Aegean.

The paper is not a comprehensive treatise of the current state of affairs between Greece and Turkey. The scope is to focus on a few highlights that demonstrate in turn the impact of the crisis on the Greek public debate on, perception of, and strategy towards Turkey. The analysis is placed in the context of a strategic consensus that was ruptured during the crisis and the lack of bipartisanship on the country’s security preferences. Although Athens and Ankara have enjoyed an unusually long period of calm waters in the Aegean from 1999 to 2016, the last two years have produced the familiar aggressive rhetoric and mutual mistrust. With the bilateral issues intact, the traditional inertia on both sides can easily turn into heightened tensions with the risk of miscalculation given the proximity

¹ Walter Lippmann, *US Foreign Policy, Shield of the Republic*, Boston, Little Brown, 1943, p.4-5.

of military hardware being hardly insignificant. The paper also presents some of the findings of a research conducted by the two guest editors of this special issue on the Greek elites' perceptions of Turkey in the midst of the crisis.

The State of Play

On 7 December 2017, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan formally visited Athens. According to media reports, it was one of the biggest security operations in living memory – with 2,800 police deployed around Athens, snipers posted on rooftops, and commandos, sniffer dogs, bomb disposal experts and bodyguards drafted in. The visit, the first by a Turkish President in 65 years, was described by the majority of Greek media as a diplomatic fiasco. The assessment, not only in the Greek media, was that the summit:

Turned into a verbal theatre of war as Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, flouting the niceties of diplomacy, crossed an array of red lines. Disputes that had lain dormant – not least the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne delineating the borders between the two nations – were prised open with brutal force (...). 'It needs to be modernised,' he said of the treaty, which has long governed Greek-Turkish relations and is seen as a cornerstone of regional peace.²

A few months earlier, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu had also taken aim at the Treaty of Lausanne saying that Ankara will not accept '*de facto* situations' in the Aegean Sea. Speaking before Turkey's National Assembly, Çavuşoğlu said that a number of interconnected problems remain in the Aegean between the two neighbouring countries. "Among these problems is the question of sovereignty of certain islets and rocky formations, and the fact that there are no sea borders which are set by an international agreement between Turkey and Greece."³

With tensions running high between the two neighbouring nations, Athens had hoped the visit would be heralded as a new beginning by putting a deteriorating bilateral relationship on a new footing. It was thought it would be a meeting with only gains to be made. A less than favourable international environment for President Erdoğan's domestic crackdown, following the failed treasonous coup against him in July 2016, had "strained relations with Europe and the US and meant that the Turkish leader has made fewer trips to the west."⁴ In Athens, the Greek government expected someone who would reciprocate to its diplomatic overtures and appreciate the positive spotlight offered by striking a more conciliatory note. Instead, the Turkish leader did nothing but ratcheting up a rather confrontational rhetoric and jettisoning diplomatic niceties during meetings that were supposed to improve relations in the Aegean. In his meeting with the Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras, President Erdoğan attacked Greece for failing to look after Ottoman sites and provide a proper place of worship for Muslims. In Cyprus, he bluntly put the blame of the latest round of failure to resolve the long-standing issue, exclusively on the Greek and the Greek Cypriot side who kept turning down

2 Helena Smith. "Confrontational Erdoğan stuns Greek hosts on Athens visit", *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/dec/07/turkish-president-erdogan-to-make-landmark-visit-to-greece>, (Accessed on 8 December 2017).

3 "Turkish FM disputes Lausanne Treaty", *ekathimerini.com*, 16 August 2017, <http://www.ekathimerini.com/220905/article/ekathimerini/news/turkish-fm-disputes-lausanne-treaty>, (Accessed on 16 March 2018). The official position of Turkey on 'the outstanding Aegean Issues' can be found at <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/maritime-issues---aegean-sea---the-outstanding-aegean-issues.en.mfa>.

4 Ibid.

a comprehensive settlement. He also reprimanded his hosts by attacking the living standards and economic gap between Greeks, and the Turkish-speaking Muslim minority in the province of Thrace in north-eastern Greece.⁵

Once more, he demanded the handover of the eight Turkish officers who had escaped to Greece as the July 2016 coup unfolded. The eight landed at the airport of the north-eastern Greek city of Alexandroupolis in a Black Hawk helicopter after issuing a mayday signal and requesting permission for an emergency landing, which was granted. They immediately applied for political asylum and the Turkish demand to extradite them was turned down by the Greek Supreme Court. The verdict further heightened the tension between Athens and Ankara.⁶ Ankara, which had pledged to give the officers a fair trial, has been calling for their return since the day they fled Turkey and responded to the Court's verdict with anger. A statement from the Turkish foreign ministry read: "We protest this decision which prevents these individuals who have threatened the life of our president and took an active role in a coup attempt that killed 248 of our citizens ... from appearing in front of Turkish judiciary... Once again Greece, an ally and a neighbour, has failed to fulfil the basics of the fight against terrorism".⁷ The ministry said the ruling was "politically motivated... cooperation and relations with Greece would be re-evaluated, adding that the judgment violated international norms and the rights of the victims of the coup attempt".⁸

President Erdogan personally criticised the Greek prime minister for failing to hand the soldiers over to Turkey. "From statements made in Greece by its prime minister right after the coup, we were of the positive opinion that they would be extradited to Turkey (...) We thought that Mr. Tsipras would keep his word. With time, though, we saw that the judicial authorities were mobilised and these putschists were not extradited."⁹

By late Spring 2018 all eight had been moved them out of police custody, following the expiry of the 18-month pre-trial period they are legally allowed to be detained while their asylum application is examined. They have been placed in top-secret locations under heavy police protection.¹⁰ By the time of writing, three of them had been granted asylum by the Greek Judiciary. Although the Greek Government had filed an appeal on the rulings, the Court had rejected it producing a judicial precedent that most probably applies on the remaining cases.¹¹ In a written statement on 20 April 2018, the Turkish Foreign Ministry accused Greece that "is a country that protects coup plotters" while Prime Minister Yildirim said it is a "safe haven for Gulenists".¹²

5 Ibid.

6 The court ruled against the extradition of any of the eight men, citing possible violations of human rights if they were sent home. It was the last ruling after two rounds of appeals. Kareem Shaheen and Helena Smith. "Greek court turns down extradition request for eight Turkish officers"; *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jan/26/greek-court-turns-down-extradition-request-eight-turkish-officers-ankara-failed-coup>, (Accessed on 29 June 2017).

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.

10 Helena Smith, "Turkey escalates row with Greece over 'putschist' soldiers", *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jun/05/turkey-escalates-row-with-greece-over-putschist-soldiers>, (Accessed on 6 June 2018).

11 "Top Greek court grants political refugee status to two Turkish soldiers accused of coup links", <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/top-greek-court-grants-political-refugee-status-to-two-turkish-soldiers-accused-of-coup-links-132283>, (Accessed on 28 May 2018).

12 "Greece 'safe haven' for Gulenists: PM", *Hurriyet Daily News*, 21-22 April 2018.

A further complication arose in March, when Turkish armed forces arrested two Greek soldiers who accidentally crossed the land border between Greece and Turkey. By the time of writing, they were still incarcerated without an indictment being issued while Ankara, early on, started floated the idea of an exchange, which was flatly rejected by Athens.

In a huge public rally marking the second anniversary of the failed criminal coup on 15 July 2018, the Turkish President issued a strong warning: “We will never forget those who assumed an unprincipled stance and embraced the putschists who fled our country.” In an emotionally charged speech, he went on:

The coup showed us our friends in difficult times. We have a good memory. We might not talk about what we went through very often but we never forget it. It showed us the hypocrisy (...). Ultimately, we will remember the silence of those we regarded as friends. Those who left our country will never be erased from our memory.¹³

Of course, Athens did not support the *coup* and did not ‘embrace’ the fugitives by any measure. In fact, according to credible reports both the government and the opposition were either upset or outraged when the ‘eight’ landed in Greece.¹⁴ Tom Ellis, a most senior diplomatic correspondent has very succinctly noted that “if Alexis Tsipras assured him (President Erdogan) in the first few days after the attempted coup that the putschists would be returned, that was a mistake, because no prime minister of Greece, nor any democratic European Union country, could violate European principles and international law and change judicial decisions...”.¹⁵ One thing to add: It was not just a mistake... It revealed an unprecedented ignorance and perhaps disregard of the democratic principle of the separation of powers and the independence of the Judiciary that forms the foundations of a truly liberal democratic polity.

The issue of the ‘eight’ has deeply impacted upon the bilateral relations since the summer of 2016. And the problems are manifest themselves in an alarming manner. On 13 February 2018, two issues dominated the news cycle in Greece: A major corruption scandal and a serious incident involving the ramming of the Greek Coast Guard patrol boat ‘Gavdos’ by the Turkish Coast Guard vessel ‘Umut’¹⁶ off the islets of Imia.¹⁷ According to Greek media reports, throughout the night, Turkish helicopters and electronic warfare aircraft were violating the Greek FIR east of the island of Rhodes, where Turkey’s Armed Forces were conducting a military drill. FIR violations by the Turkish Army did not stop forcing the Greek Air Force to be in full alert.¹⁸ Less than a month earlier, on 17 January 2018, a Turkish patrol boat and a Greek gunboat collided in the same area.¹⁹ Following the

13 Tom Ellis. “Erdogan’s memory, the ‘eight’ and Greek-Turkish relations”, *ekathimerini-com*, 16 July 2018, <http://www.ekathimerini.com/230731/opinion/ekathimerini/comment/erdogans-memory-the-eight-and-greek-turkish-relations>, (Accessed on 17 July 2018).

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid.

16 “Turkish coast guard vessel rams Greek patrol boat off Imia”, *ekathimerini-com*, 13 February 2018 <http://www.ekathimerini.com/225780/article/ekathimerini/news/turkish-coast-guard-vessel-rams-greek-patrol-boat-off-imia>.

17 Turkey disputes the sovereignty of the islets (called *Kardak* by the Turks).

18 <http://www.keeptalkinggreece.com/2018/02/13/aegean-turkey-greece-imia/>.

19 <http://www.keeptalkinggreece.com/2018/01/18/imia-video-jan2018/>. Also see, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/greek-turkish-patrol-ships-collide-near-disputed-islets-125921>.

incident, the two premiers Tsipras and Yildirim agreed to ease tensions and keep communication line open via political and diplomatic channels.²⁰

These incidents serve to illustrate that tension in the area can easily escalate and as a reminder that the Aegean Archipelago has the disturbing potential of plunging to a more serious crisis with alarming destabilizing effects at a regional level. The risk of miscalculation is high given the proximity of air and naval activities and the nationalist zealotry that exists in abundance in both sides of the Aegean. And things can turn sour easily. In the most recent deadly incident, a Hellenic Air Force Mirage 2000-5 fighter jet crashed in the Aegean Sea, near the island of Skyros returning from an aerial policing mission where he intercepted two Turkish Air Force F-16s on April 12, 2018.²¹ While deaths from aerial interceptions over the Aegean are thankfully uncommon, violations of Greek airspace by Turkish aircraft have been a common feature of Turkish revisionism, as Athens points out. The Greek military have reported 1,671 violations by the Turkish Air Force 2016. As a comparison, NATO fighter were scrambled 80 times to intercept Russian jets, the highest level since the Cold War. In 2017, Greek authorities have recorded 3,317 airspace violations. Quite often, interceptions are less cordial and getting into 'dogfights' turns into a dangerous routine.²² The two countries have, however, managed to keep these incidents from escalating into a real crisis situation.²³

Although, crisis has been a recurring feature in the Aegean, the most recent crisis that brought the two nations into the brink of war is not so recent anymore. It was January 1996 when the two countries nearly went to war over the islets of Imia. Only a last-minute, high-level US intervention prevented a military clash.²⁴ Less than four years later, in late 1999, following two more crises over the deployment of Russian-made S-300 antiballistic missiles in Cyprus, and the capture of Ocalan as he left the Greek Embassy in Kenya, bilateral relations began to warm. In the summer of 1999, the two countries embarked upon a dialogue on non-sensitive issues such as trade, the environment, and tourism. This process was given greater impetus by the most of unfortunate events: The earthquake in Turkey in August 1999 and the one in Athens in September the same year produced an outburst of popular sympathy in both countries. An initial breakthrough was recorded as Greece lifted its veto and agreed to support for Turkey's EU candidacy at the Helsinki summit in December 1999. Since then, Greeks and Turks have enjoyed the longest period of tranquillity since the 1950s. Although no real effort has been made to resolve the traditional disputes, this has been a period of unprecedented positive expansion of the bilateral relations outside the security arena.

20 The Turkish Prime Minister said a NATO General Staffs meeting would be held in May and in this framework, the chiefs of the general staffs of the two countries will gather and mutually discuss the necessary measures to ensure tensions in the field do not escalate further. "Turkey 'explicitly' asks Greece to refrain from tension", 14 February 2018, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/aegean-sea-should-be-friendship-sea-between-turkey-and-greece-turkish-pm-127287>, (Accessed on 16 February 2018). No reports on the outcome of the said discussions have been traced.

21 Alex Lockie, "A Greek fighter pilot died in a crash after a mission to intercept Turkish jets", *Business Insider*, 12 April 2018, <http://www.businessinsider.com/greek-fighter-jet-reportedly-crashed-after-dogfight-with-turkish-jet-2018-4>, (Accessed on 13 April 2018).

22 Ben Brimelow, "A 'secret war' between Turkey and Greece just turned deadly after a long history of dogfights over the Aegean Sea", *Business Insider*, 14 April 2018, <http://www.businessinsider.com/greece-turkey-secret-war-dogfights-aegean-sea-2018-4>, (Accessed on 15 April 2018).

23 For the official Turkish position on the issue see <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/air-space-related-related-problems.en.mfa>.

24 For a Greek take on the crisis, see Kostas Ifantis. "Power Politics, Security Dilemma, and Crisis Behavior: The Case of Imia", *Hellenic Studies*, Vol.9, No.2, Autumn 2001, p.29-48.

A Threat-from-the East Security Mindset and “The Balancing Engagement Strategy”

Historically, the ‘fear’ of Turkey has haunted the security culture in Greece and shaped security strategy and thinking. Greeks have long viewed their eastern neighbour as a ‘revisionist’ actor aiming at challenging and ultimately changing the Lausanne Treaty *status quo* in the Aegean.²⁵ Greek political and security culture at large has been shaped by a strong perception of the ‘threat from the East’; hence the core of the Greek defence policy since the 1960s has been the containment of that perceived Turkish revisionism through the implementation of a classic balance of power strategy.

The internal elements of the strategy have been a constant effort to modernize both in qualitative and quantitative terms the Greek armed forces. Actually, since the 1970s, Greece’s defence spending has been among the highest in the West²⁶ and constantly well above NATO average.²⁷ Even during the crisis that led to the country almost defaulting on its public debt, Greece’s defence spending never fell below the 2% of GDP NATO requirement.²⁸ As of 2010 Greece allocated \$6.5 billion to its military spending, but using a comparable exchange rate, its military spending overall slightly exceeded \$10 billion. Given the fact that Greece’s population is almost 11 million, the rate of military spending *per capita* has been very high²⁹, especially for an economy that contracted by almost 25% since 2009. Although the internal balancing strategy has more or less remained constant, the external balancing elements of the Greek strategy have been the expression of a major strategic shift in Athens’ thinking since 1999.

By early to mid-2000s Athens put in place what I have termed a ‘balancing engagement strategy’³⁰ or what Panagiotis Tsakonas has called a ‘socialization’ strategy³¹ under which Greece made a serious effort to exploit Turkey’s expressed desire to seek EU membership. At the heart of this rather impressive ‘external balancing’ shift has been the realization that the EU can become a most effective bulwark in the quest to modify Turkish perceptions and preferences in the Aegean and in Cyprus. At the same time, the ‘internal balancing’ needs were catered to through a series of decisions in favour of rapid change and improvement of the Greek security and defence planning system. The focus was on overall strategic planning and reshaping of defence doctrine; restructuring of the armed forces;

25 Days prior to the December 2017 official state visit to Athens, President Erdogan in an interview said that “when I talk about revision (of the Treaty), I mean a discussion of everything, from A to Z. Greece may be not very comfortable with certain issues, certain provisions, but we can sit down and talk”. Alexis Papachelas. “On way to Athens, Erdogan seeks ‘update’ of Lausanne Treaty”, *ekathimerini-com*, 6 December 2017, <http://www.ekathimerini.com/223941/article/ekathimerini/comment/on-way-to-athens-erdogan-seeks-update-of-lausanne-treaty>, (Accessed on 16 March 2017).

26 <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/MS.MIL.XPND.GD.ZS?locations=GR>.

27 Throughout the 1980s, Greece was averaging a defense budget of 6.2% of GDP, see Ian Bremmer. “The only 5 countries that meet NATO’s defense spending requirements”, *Time*, 24 February 2017, <http://time.com/4680885/nato-defense-spending-budget-trump/>.

28 In 2010 Greece spent 2.64% of GDP, in 2011 2.38, in 2012 and 2013 2.29, in 2014 2.21, in 2015 2.32, in 2016 2.38 and in 2017 2.32% of GDP. In 2009 the percentage was 3.1. See NATO Communiqué. “Defence Expenditure of NATO Countries (2010-2017)”, PR/CP(2017)111, https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2017_06/20170629_170629-pr2017-111-en.pdf.

29 <https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/europe/gr-budget.htm>.

30 Kostas Ifantis, “Perception and Rapprochement: Debating a Greek Strategy Towards Turkey”, M. Aydin and K. Ifantis (eds). *Turkish-Greek Relations, The Security Dilemma in the Aegean*, London, Routledge, 2004, p.245-268.

31 Panagiotis Tsakonas. *The Incomplete Breakthrough in Greek-Turkish Relations: Grasping Greece’s Socialization Strategy*, Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2010.

military spending, and military diplomacy. Regarding the Defence Doctrine³², the solution to the strategic dilemma that Greece faced was the adoption of a 'flexible response,' meaning the creation of additional choices in crisis management.

With support coming from all quarters (Europe and the US), the December 1999 EU Helsinki summit marked the departure point for engaging Turkey in a context where Greece was thought to enjoy a strategic advantage. The Helsinki communique was a watershed moment for Greek foreign and security policy. Until then, Greece with its vetoing of Turkey's European vocation was usually isolated in the EU and Councils and Summits as well as being at the receiving end of Washington's resentment for undermining Turkey's western anchoring. Also, Turkish political and military elites would blast Greece as obstructionist, and Athens would escalate the rhetoric. In the end, the only real loser in this process was Greece. Recognizing that policies formulated primarily to punish Turkey for actions in the Aegean and Cyprus did little to advance its own national interests, especially in Washington, Greece had to come up with something far more strategic. Under the new approach, the EU would occupy a pivotal position in 'filtering' the Greek-Turkish interaction with the integration norms and values. Then, the one-dimensional crisis management and crisis diffusion role and importance of Washington could be losing some of its urgency. The working assumption in Athens was that insofar as Turkey's pre-eminent strategic goal has been membership in the EU, then Greece could lift its vetoes and would formally seek to conditioning Turkey's European perspective with tangible progress towards full normalization of the bilateral relationship and resolving of the Cyprus problem according to UN and EU decisions and standards. The goal of such a strategy would be to Europeanize the Aegean dispute(s), to Europeanize the Cyprus problem and its solution and to thus transform both the Aegean and Cyprus from zero sum to a win-win setting where the issues are taken care of according to Greek preferences with and Turkey feeling satisfied by enjoying the benefits of full membership.

In principle, the 'Helsinki' strategy would seek to maintain and enhance relations with Turkey as much as possible in various policy realms by using three elements. Regarding economics and trade, engagement has meant seeking an expansion of relations and the growth of exchanges. Politically, engagement would seek to maximize bilateral contacts at every level, while pushing back(stage) traditional disputes. Militarily, Greece agreed to an enhancement of military-to-military relations within the NATO framework, with the specific aim of increasing mutual confidence and reaching agreement on the 'rules of the game'. The overall approach rested on the hope that growing economic, political and military contacts and cooperation as well as enmeshing Turkey in the European integration system could socialize the powerful and sceptical part of the Turkish elites into European norms of behaviour and increase their stake in a course of reform. A successful EU-Turkish engagement would be a definitely attractive project for Turkey where the arduous course of reform and modernization would be seen as worth the effort in terms of its final pay off. Which should have been full membership in the EU and consolidation of Turkey's position in the most powerful and democratic group of nations.³³

32 Concerning armaments, the defense doctrine revision required the intensification of defense efforts, that is, an increase in the amount of resources devoted to defense. In 1996, an armaments program worth almost 15 billion euro was agreed upon and implemented in the following five years. In 2000, a second five-year (2001-2005) 20-billion-euro program was agreed upon and largely implemented. Throughout this period, Greek military procurement put exclusive emphasis on the acquisition of modern weaponry and the development of high quality defense capabilities (C4, force multipliers, etc.).

33 See Ifantis, "Perception and Rapprochement".

On the Greek side, the move toward detente was part of a larger 'grand strategic' decision to complete the 'Europeanization' of Greek foreign and security policy, consolidate Greece's position in Europe, and promote the anchoring of Turkey in European institutions-not unlike the long-term strategy of France toward Germany after the Second World War. From Greece's perspective, a 'European' Turkey would mean a stable, predictable and closely cooperative neighbour, within a shared community of values, with open borders and the resolution of historic problems in the Aegean and Cyprus.³⁴ Based on past experience, Greece would also expect that the Europeanization pressures would permeate Turkish domestic political and societal fabric and would be powerful driver for fuller democratization, market transparency, economic and social reforms, and greater respect for human rights. Such a transformation would allow great levels of bilateral trust and facilitate the peaceful resolution of disputes. Support for the opening of accession negotiations in October 2005 was the most powerful manifestation of this new grand strategy of engagement in a framework conducive to full normalization of the relations between the two historic rivals.³⁵ Moreover, the Greek strategic shift should - in theory at least - compel Europe to pay even closer attention to areas and issues of concern to Athens – the most important of which has been Cyprus – and has increasingly 'Europeanized' the question of Athens' Turkish policy, to a certain extent balancing out the traditional Cold War-made US security influence. Turkey's European aspirations were thought to be directly tied to a resolution of its differences with Greece over the Aegean and Cyprus.³⁶ Although the shift was indeed grand strategic, the prospect of a breakthrough and a substantive rapprochement between Athens and Ankara became tangible throughout the 2000s, traditional security concerns and containment strategies remained a strong element of Greek military planning, although a series of CBMs were agreed and implemented (to a some degree). Against a backdrop of unresolved air and sea space disputes in the Aegean Greek military spending remained much higher than the European average with the perception of the Turkish 'threat' a constant characteristic of elite thinking.

Crisis and Greek Elite Perceptions and Thinking

Even before the recent downturn in the Greek-Turkish interaction, the domestic debate about an ever 'threatening' Turkey never really abated. In November 2014, the first empirical investigation of Greek elites' perception towards Turkey was published by the two guest editors of this special issue.³⁷ It is a

34 See Kostas Ifantis. "Whither Turkey? Greece's Aegean Options", C. Arvanitopoulos (ed.) *Turkey's Accession to the European Union: An Unusual Candidacy*, Berlin, Heidelberg, Springer-Verlag, 2009, p.121-132.

35 The general course of Greek-Turkish relations is rather well known, as well are the policy problems. The relevant literature has grown considerably but given the lack of substantial progress on the ground, nothing new has been added in the last 15 years, with very few exceptions. Here is a rather selective list of major international works on the relations between Greece and Turkey. Mustafa Aydin and Kostas Ifantis (eds.), *Turkish-Greek Relations: The Security Dilemma in the Aegean*, London, Routledge, 2004; Tozun Bahcheli, *Greek-Turkish Relations Since 1955*, Boulder, Westview Press, 1990; Theodore A. Coulombis, *The United States, Greece, and Turkey: The Trouble Triangle*, New York, Praeger, 1983; Dimitris Keridis and Dimitrios Triantaphyllou (eds.), *Greek-Turkish Relations in the Era of Globalization*, Herndon, Brassey's, 2001; Monteagle Stearns, *Entangled Allies: US Policy Toward Greece, Turkey and Cyprus*, New York, Council on Foreign Relations, 1992; Anastasia Strati, "Greece and the Law of the Sea: A Greek Perspective", Aldo Chircop, Andre Gerolymatos and John O. Iatrides (eds.), *The Aegean sea After the Cold War: Security and Law of the Sea Issues*, New York' St. Martin's Press, 2000; Andrew Wilson, "The Aegean Dispute", *Adelphi Paper 15*, London, IISS, 1979-80. Also Tsakonas, *The Incomplete Breakthrough*.

36 F. Stephen Larrabee and Ian O. Lesser. *Turkish Foreign Policy in an Age of Uncertainty*, Santa Monica, RAND Corporation, 2003, p.72.

37 Kostas Ifantis and Dimitrios Triantaphyllou, "National Role and Foreign Policy: A Descriptive Study of Greek Elites' Perceptions towards Turkey", November 2014, <http://www.lse.ac.uk/europeanInstitute/research/>

Foreign Policy Analysis assessment of the national role perceptions of political elites in Greece. The main focus was to examine whether the Greek elites have re-evaluated their conceptions regarding the goals, limitations and prospects of Greek foreign policy, as well as their overall perception regarding the post-crisis Greek state's position among its neighbours and the international community in general. In this context, the aim was to analyse and provide an in-depth understanding of Greek elites' views and perceptions of Greece's position in the world amidst the financial crisis that has crippled the country's resources, and how these conceptions are related to Greece's relations with Turkey post-2009.³⁸ For the purposes and scope of this paper, a very brief summary of the findings about Turkey and Greek-Turkish relations is presented. The context revolves around Greece's downgraded status and prestige and Turkey's regional emergence and new geopolitical confidence. As a whole, these factors combine to impact upon developing perceptions.³⁹

The findings have offered some insight into the thinking and mind-set of Greek foreign policy elites towards Turkey as well as Greece's standing in the world during the financial crisis that led Greece to the edge of public debt default. In summarising the results of this inquiry, the following should be noted.⁴⁰

First, the responses to the questions regarding to Greece's position in the global system, reveal an elite conviction that Greece plays, or should play, a more important and active role in the international arena. Most of the respondents agreed that Greece is a small nation, but with a disproportionately high capability to influence international affairs effectively. Based on the responses, there is a number of roles that can be attributed to Greece. The role of Regional Leader is definitely the first and most important one. This role perception is actually consistent with the country's older foreign policy orientation. Another role is that of a paragon, in the sense of offering a positive example for other states, as most respondents suggested that Greece's commitment to International Law and quality of ideas could influence international politics. It seems there is a strong conviction that Greece constitutes a benevolent actor in international politics, in the sense that it abides to its international commitments and defends and promotes International Law.

The second finding relates to the process of Greek-Turkish rapprochement, which began in 1999. The results of the survey strongly suggest that the rapprochement strategy's degree of

hellenicObservatory/pdf/Ifantis-Triantafylloy-(PROJECT-REPORT).pdf. The following part draws largely on this research report. Also, Kostas Ifantis, Dimitrios Triantaphyllou and Andreas Kotelis, "National Role and Foreign Policy: An Exploratory Study of Greek Elites' Perceptions towards Turkey", *GreeSE Paper No.94 Hellenic Observatory Papers on Greece and Southeast Europe*, August 2015, <http://www.lse.ac.uk/Hellenic-Observatory/Assets/Documents/Publications/GreeSE-Papers/GreeSE-No94.pdf>.

38 Ibid.

39 Ibid. As elites the following categories were identified and interviewed: Businessmen - members of the Hellenic Federation of Enterprises; Journalists - diplomatic correspondents, senior editors, commentators in major Athens dailies, TV and radio stations, as well as, news websites; Diplomats - directorate heads, deputy heads and senior Embassy personnel; Military officers - officers ranking brigadier general and higher as well as retired senior officers; Politicians - members of the Permanent National Defence and Foreign Affairs Committee and European Affairs Committee of the Hellenic Parliament; and Academics - IR and politics faculty members. The questionnaire which was web-based and constructed in a way that would protect the anonymity of the respondents was sent to the sample, while the whole process took place during the period of 1 May to 30 October 2014. The overall response rate to the questionnaire was 41.95% (219 respondents out of 522 sent questionnaires). Although the response rate might sound low, it is actually considerably higher than the mean response rate when referring to e-mail surveys. Coupled with the fact that this study employs a purposive sampling, the response rate should be considered more than satisfying.

40 Ifantis, Triantaphyllou and Kotelis, "National Role and Foreign Policy", p.27-29.

acceptance is remarkably high among all groups, apart from the military elite. Furthermore, the impact of rapprochement on Greek-Turkish relations was also assessed positively as more respondents characterized the then level of relations as 'rather good' or 'good', even though almost half of them replied 'neither good, nor bad'. However, continued support for Turkey's EU accession process does not enjoy the same consensus from the respondents.

On Turkey and Turkish foreign policy in general, the survey results indicate a strong distrust and a deeply embedded perception of threat, which seems to be the result of a profound foreign policy activism, strong economic growth (although the growth of Turkish economic power was not considered as threatening *per se*) and elevated prestige of Turkey at a time when Greece was suffering a major international setback. Moreover, although US-Turkish relations have been deteriorating, the belief in Greece was that they remain strong and strategic in nature. As someone would expect, the EU-Turkey relations were seen as weak. Finally, there also seemed to be a strong inclination, among the respondents, towards the assumption that Turkey has been distancing itself from the West and reorienting itself towards the Middle East.

On the democratisation issue of Turkey, Greek elites seemed, on the one hand, reluctant to accept the changes regarding democratisation, and, on the other hand, confident that the changes have indeed been realised when the questions concern Turkish foreign policy. In addition, there was high consent that changes in Turkish foreign policy can be attributed to the religious views of Recep Tayyip Erdogan. At the same time, there was a profound indifference with regard to Turkey's strategies in the wider Middle East. Contrary to expectations because of the upgraded relations with Israel (and) as a result of the breakdown of relations between Ankara and Tel Aviv, the results recorded quite low levels of interest.

Finally, special mention should be made to the Cyprus issue. A vast majority of the respondents consider the Cyprus problem a fundamental prerequisite for the normalisation of the bilateral relations, although the consensus was that should a 'hot' crisis occur between Greece and Turkey over the course of the next five years, this would be due to trouble related to the Aegean rather than Cyprus. Though, this in itself would suggest a degree of decoupling between what are considered to be bilateral differences as opposed to the Cyprus issue which concerns the fate of a third party, the responses also seem to infer that should the Cyprus conundrum be resolved, the peace dividend would be tremendous.⁴¹

More than three years later, a nationwide poll⁴² suggested that Turkey's tendency to question Greek national sovereignty is the biggest problem facing Greece in its relations with its Aegean neighbour. According to the survey, 74 percent of respondents said challenging Greek sovereignty in the Aegean and over islands such as Kastelorizo, Fourni and the Dodecanese is the most important issue, while 16 percent believe it is Turkey's aggression and intransigence. Asked where Greek-Turkish relations stand today compared to a year ago, 81 percent said they have deteriorated, 16 percent said

41 "The multiplier effect would impact positively on the issue of trust, the commitment to the rapprochement process, and Turkey's EU accession negotiations, as well as on the wider regional and international context, with particular emphasis on NATO, the European Union and the relations between the two. In other words, the inference is that the resolution of the Cyprus issue would be a game changer". *Ibid.*, p.29.

42 "Questioning Greek sovereignty is biggest problem with Turkey, poll shows", *ekathimerini.com*, 29 April 2018, <http://www.ekathimerini.com/228153/article/ekathimerini/news/questioning-greek-sovereignty-is-biggest-problem-with-turkey-poll-shows>, (Accessed on 17 May 2018).

they are the same and just 2 percent believe they have improved. Concerning the Greek government's handling of bilateral relations with Turkey, 54 percent of the respondents said it was 'probably wrong', versus 37 percent who responded 'probably correct'. At the same time, 56 percent of participants said that the criticism levelled by the opposition against the government on its policy towards Turkey is 'probably wrong', while 32 percent it is 'probably correct'.

The same survey found that 67 percent of respondents are 'probably against' Turkey's accession to the European Union and 27 percent are 'probably in favour'. However, the vast majority said Greece should continue to engage in dialogue and negotiations with Turkey (70 percent) with only 28 percent being against talks. Asked whether they believe a war with Turkey is probable in the years to come, 52 percent said it is 'improbable', and 44 percent it is 'probable'.

Conclusion: The Crisis and the end of Consensus in Greek Foreign and Security Policy⁴³

Although empirical research has demonstrated (see above) that there is more continuity rather than change in the perception of Turkey as a security threat, the unprecedented impact of the economic crisis on the Greek state and society has manifested itself as a deep rupture of that grand consensus. The war-time like recession undermined the post-dictatorship democratic *acquis*, polarized public debate as well as political discourse and left a deep scar in Greek political culture by empowering populists from both left and right, nationalists and eurosceptics, by granting visibility and strong parliamentary representation to undemocratic and illiberal radical leftist forces as well as neo-Nazi criminal groups.

The country found itself in the midst of a polarized and bruising debate about the nature and scope of its engagement with Europe and the world. The current reassessment is only the latest of many; ever since Greece's emergence as a modern nation-state, its leaders and citizens have regularly scrutinized the costs and benefits of foreign orientation. For Greeks who lived through the bipartisan consensus of the post-1974 era, the current political warfare over Greece's external orientation seems to be a dramatic aberration.

Fuelled by these ideological divides, partisanship has engulfed Greece. The political landscape today is more politically fractious and polarized than at any time in the last forty years. Instead, the political rancour has only intensified. The sources of this return to partisan rancour are international as well as domestic. The global financial crisis and the absence of a global consensus to deal with it have weakened the European integration project, producing growing disparities in wealth among Greeks, creating new socioeconomic cleavages and eroding support for Europe, and leaving the country's foreign policy more vulnerable to the vicissitudes of party politics.

In a crisis-riven Greece, however, Lippmann's concern with political solvency is more relevant than ever. With the collapse of a social, economic and party system paradigm, Greeks appear to share less common ground on the fundamental purposes of Greece's position and role in Europe and the nature of its future engagement with the world than at any other time since the early 1980. It seems that a critical gap has opened up between Greece's European orientation and its political appetite

43 This final part draws on Kostas Ifantis, "Finding the Water's Edge", Maria Gianniou (ed.), *Greek Foreign Policy: Global Trends and Challenges*, Athens, Hellenic Centre for European Studies, 2013, p.9-14.

for sustaining them. Successive parliamentary elections since 2012 revealed a polarized political arrangement between those who believe in the country's European present and future and those who blame Europe for Greece's predicament and envision a parochial radical and/or autarchic alternative. The two sides disagree on matters of grand strategy as well as on matters of political economy. As made clear by the collision between these two formal and informal coalitions the country's bipartisan consensus on foreign policy is in real danger of collapsing and the political foundations of Greek statecraft will continue to disintegrate, exposing the country to the dangers of an erratic and incoherent foreign policy.

The financial collapse and the rapid deterioration of social conditions marked the hollowing out of the bipartisan centre that had been the pre-crisis consensus political base. Lawmakers that support the government and those that oppose it hold very different views on foreign policy. On the most basic questions of grand strategy - the sources and purposes of Greece's relative power, the role of European institutions - representatives of the government coalition and those of the Left and extreme Right are on different planets. 'European' Greece and 'non-aligned proud' Greece disagree about what the nature of the country's engagement in the world should be as well as about domestic issues. Liberals are in ever shorter supply, resulting in the thinning out of what Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., aptly labelled 'the vital center'. A generational change has taken its toll. The '*metapolitefsi* generation' is fast retiring from political life, heavily burdened by guilt over its grand domestic failures. With the pro-European forces opting for the painful but necessary course of a long-awaited adjustment and modernization, the widely accepted compact for Greece's liberal vocation has come undone. The ideological overlap between the two sides is thus minimal, and the areas of concord are superficial at best. With the domestic landscape already deeply etched along ideological lines, the partisan confrontation is poised to intensify - a recipe for political stalemate at home and failed engagement abroad.

In such a critical moment, enhancing Greek security by crafting a new grand strategy that is politically sustainable is of vital importance. It is the only way to steady an international and European community that continue to doubt Greece's ability and willingness to reengage itself at regional, European and global levels. Formulating a politically solvent strategy will require adjusting to diminishing means. It will be necessary to stabilize the nation's foreign policy by shoring up public support for a new vision of the Greece's foreign and security responsibilities. Solvency is the path to security; it is far better for Greece to arrive at a more rational grand strategy that enjoys adequate domestic backing than to continue drifting toward an intractable polarization that would be as dangerous as it would be humiliating.

Former US Secretary of State Dean Acheson once claimed that 80 percent of the job of foreign policy was 'management of your domestic ability to have a policy'. He may have exaggerated, but he expressed an enduring truth: good policy requires good politics. Bringing ends and means back into balance would help restore the confidence of the Greek public in the conduct of foreign policy. But implementing a strategic adjustment will require dampening polarization and building a stable consensus behind it. Sound leadership and tireless public diplomacy are prerequisites for fashioning an as widely accepted as possible cooperation on foreign policy.

Dealing with a troubled Turkey would require refashioning of the 'balancing engagement strategy'. A strategic effort to re-engage Turkey is essential. Using shrewd diplomacy to dampen any

chance for strategic competition with Turkey reemerging is a strategic imperative. Should Greek efforts be reciprocated, they promise to yield the substantial benefits that would accompany a reinvigorated rapprochement. At the same time the balancing element should also be taken care of. A major defence rethink is long overdue. A new thinking on threat assessment and the allocation of defence resources in an era of economic restraint is a grand strategic necessity. Getting this right is critical for national security and survival.