

THE SHADOW OF PAST RIVALRY: LIMITS OF POST-1999 DYNAMISM IN GRECO-TURKISH RELATIONS

Eda Kuşku*

Abstract

This essay will enquire whether Turkey and Greece could remove their enduring controversies through confidence building measures, mediation and inter-governmental dialogues which were introduced in the post-1999 détente period. The paper will specifically focus on the recent nature of understanding between the two countries and will endeavour to answer the question of whether there is a divergence in the nature of recent cooperative arrangements from those which were concluded in the former periods of détente and each of which were disrupted by succeeding periods of either armed conflict or cold war. The paper contends that the recent nature of Greek-Turkish relations is not problem-free. Yet, the new cooperative environment facilitated by confidence building measures and growing mutual understanding could help resolve the disputes and dispel reservations in the Aegean and Cyprus which have been very central to national security considerations of both Turkey and Greece. From a security perspective, continuation of previous policies towards one another is counterproductive in the post-1999 period. Improvement of a bilateral dialogue under the EU umbrella is detrimental for the defence considerations of both Turkey and Greece.

Keywords: *Greece, Turkey, European Union, security, Cyprus, Aegean, rapprochement*

Introduction

This essay will enquire whether Turkey and Greece could remove their enduring controversies through confidence building measures, mediation and inter-governmental dialogues which were introduced in the post-1999 détente period.

The paper will specifically focus on the recent nature of understanding between the two countries and will endeavour to answer the question of whether there is a divergence in the nature of recent cooperative arrangements from those which were concluded in former periods of détente, each of which were disrupted by succeeding periods of either armed conflict or cold war.

The analysis, therefore, will initially require a comprehensive description of the issues that led Turkey and Greece to enter the earlier periods of détente and the centrality of those issues to the national security interests of both countries. Thus, the question is: why was it that Turkey and Greece could not cooperate in the periods prior to the latest rapprochement? The second part of the analysis will elaborate on the factors that facilitated the recent détente and further

* Eda Kuşku is a doctoral candidate at the Sabancı University, İstanbul, Turkey. She specializes in International Relations and Comparative Politics with a specific focus on the European Union and its relations with Turkey.

reconciliation between Greece and Turkey. The paper will evaluate the impact of new areas of security cooperation as reflections of changing international dynamics, transformations in the impacts of the European Union (EU), changing attitudes of the publics in Greece and Turkey and the political leaders and the interconnection between all these factors.

The ultimate aim will be to assess the correlation between the above mentioned dimensions of the relationship and the national security interests of Greece and Turkey. The related question is whether the recent cooperative environment that was facilitated by the above factors would help resolve the disputes and dispel reservations in the Aegean and Cyprus, which have always been central to national security considerations of Greece and Turkey?

Historical Baggage: Former Controversies and Détente Phases

In the history of their dyadic relationship, Turkey and Greece went through a number of events which made cooperation between the two neighbours fragile and unpromising. Given the shadow of many unresolved past disputes, some observers of Greek-Turkish relations have reservations about the prospects for a continuous and encouraging relationship even under the present accommodating state of affairs.

Going back to their processes of state formation, the record of Turkish-Greek history is full of inconsistencies which originate primarily from the issue of the Greek independence movement, as Greeks were the most resentful for not being independent under the four centuries of Ottoman rule. This inferior position of Greece continued with their defeat in 1919-1922 Greco-Turkish war.

In the period of the 1930s and in the subsequent decades until the 1960s, most historians agree that the two countries were entering a new era in bilateral relations. Leaders of both countries, i.e. Atatürk and Venizelos reached compromise with the practice of ‘population exchange’ under the treaty of Lausanne. This mutually agreed expulsion created a malaise, especially in Greek domestic affairs. The relaxation of tensions between the two governments carried with it the side effect of creating refugee populations in both countries. Although both Greece and Turkey had difficulties in managing their refugee problems, they regarded the population exchange as one of a constructive agreement between the two governments that alleviated Greco-Turkish bilateral relations. In their opinion, it was a positive development in the process of state formation, since the population exchange helped fortify the nation-state construction of Greece and Turkey with their then fairly homogenized and stabilized populations.

Political, economic and security agreements, which were claimed to have been created in the spirit of this Atatürk-Venizelos conciliation, were followed after the World War II by an enhanced relationship with the inclusion of both Turkey and Greece under the ‘western alliance system’. They both became members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) to cooperate against the common Soviet threat. In order to reinforce the western security and defence structure, this Greco-Turkish cooperation was encouraged by the US government which had immense leverage over both countries during the early years of the Cold War. Thus, Greece and Turkey were both critical actors in the containment of the Soviet Union which was the overriding security concern for the US in the emerging bipolar

international system.¹ As part of this containment strategy of the US, Turkey and Greece were also the recipients of aid under the Marshall Plan.² Hence, the first half of the 1950s was a continuation of cooperative arrangements under the military establishment of NATO. The existence of past rivalry could not impede the emergence of an understanding at the international level, given the fact that taking the side of the US in the bipolar international balance-of-power structure was to the benefit of both Turkey and Greece. Hence, the convergence of interests under the NATO alliance inaugurated easy-going Greco-Turkish relations. Unfortunately, new confrontations began to emerge during the 1960s and 1970s and the security consensus of the early post-war period began to erode.³ Thus being satellites of the US couldn't prevent Turkey and Greece from starting to diverge from one another once they were pulled into long-lasting controversies in Cyprus and in the Aegean.

A series of events leading to a stalemate in Greco-Turkish relations started as early as 1960, when Cyprus was granted independent status according to an agreement signed between the guarantor powers of Great Britain, Greece, and Turkey. Difficulties in reconciling the dispute between the ethnic communities of Turks and Greeks in the island began to increase as the Cyprus crisis was exacerbated during the 1963-1967 outbreaks of intercommunal violence. The following decade was marked by a number of incidents that added to the intensification of the conflict. Turkish Armed Forces intervened in 1974 and occupied one third of Cyprus, which resulted in the *fait accompli* partitioning of the island. Since then there have been many attempts by the UN (United Nations) and recently by the EU to initiate the process of settling the conflict between the two communities of the island. Despite these efforts, the thirty-five years of unresolved conflict reached a deadlock that gave rise to pessimism among many analysts, and undid their hopes about the success of confidence building measures in redirecting the present day affairs between Greece and Turkey. Details of the Cyprus dispute are beyond the scope of this paper. The importance of the Cyprus conflict for the purpose of this essay is the way in which the crisis in the island has transformed foreign policy making in Greece and Turkey. The ongoing impasse resulted in unilateral and nationalistic foreign policy making in both countries.

During the same period when the Cyprus crisis was growing violent, Turkey undertook a number of unilateral actions to revise the international legal status of the Aegean. In 1973-1974 Turkey took up the matters of Continental Shelf (CS), the Flight Information Region (FIR), and the incompatibility between the 10-mile limit of Greece's air space with the 6-mile limit of its territorial waters.⁴ In 1987, tensions further escalated after Turkey's attempt to conduct underwater research on the Greek Continental Shelf in the Aegean.

As soon as Turkey and Greece began to define themselves within the western state system, in all of their disputes both sides began to expect the support of the West, particularly that of the US.⁵ Later, escalating tensions between Turkey and Greece undermined their preceding security consensus and complicated the relations of both countries with NATO and with the US. It is fair to argue that the nature of the alliance between Turkey and Greece and the great powers is also critical in understanding the way in which their dyadic relationship has

¹ Koliopoulos, John S, Veremis, Thanos, "Greece, the Modern Sequel: From 1821 to the Present", London, 2004, pp. 302-303.

² Koliopoulos, John S, Veremis, Thanos 2004, pp. 302-303.

³ Aydın, Mustafa, "Contemporary Turkish-Greek Relations: Constraints and Opportunities", in Mustafa Aydın and Kostas Ifantis (eds) "Turkish-Greek Relations: The Security Dilemma in the Aegean", London, 2004, p. 25

⁴ Koliopoulos, John S, Veremis, Thanos 2004, p. 320.

⁵ Aydın, Mustafa, Ifantis, Kostas 2004, p. 26.

evolved. The nature of the bilateral relationship between Greece and the US has significantly transformed as US dominance has begun to diminish, and especially after Greece's EU membership in 1981.

Greece first applied for membership to the European Community (EC) in 1959, and Turkey reciprocated immediately. Yet, the military takeover in Greece between the years 1967 and 1974 and the series of events that followed Turkish intervention in Cyprus in 1974 crippled the EC-Turkey and EC-Greece dialogue. In the following period Konstantinos Karamanlis, who was then the Greek Prime Minister, began to execute the so called 'shuttle diplomacy' and reapplied in 1975 for EC membership knowing that the newly established Greek democracy was very fragile and in need of the EC anchor. Conversely, Turkish Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit chose to move away from the EC to get his interests recognized. Interplay of a number of other factors such as the civil war in Turkey, economic nationalism and EC opposition of the National Front⁶ made Turkey further deviate from the path to EC membership.

In the aftermath of its accession to the EU, Greek foreign policy gradually moved away from reliance on America and became oriented towards Europe. Turkish foreign policy remained linked to the US throughout the Cold War years, and the US continued to be the key strategic partner for Turkey in the following period. Thus, different orientations in foreign policy making, founded on the attachment of Greece and Turkey to great powers, would in part explain why Turkey and Greece were further moving away from one another towards the end of the Cold War. Mustafa Aydın argues that the foreign policies of Turkey and Greece continue to be shaped mostly by western patronage and influence, with the purpose of maintaining a position within the western state system.⁷ The Cold War legacy was detrimental in the formulation of bilateral foreign policy for Greece and Turkey. Some argue that the escalation of tensions between Greece and Turkey after a series of events during the end of Cold War have led to the re-emergence of earlier distrust. In particular, Greece's threat perceptions were transformed with the declining threat of communism and growing assistance of the European institutions. Greece began to concentrate on the threats to its national security coming from Turkey, although Turkey continuously declared to have no claims beyond its 'Misak-ı Milli' borders.

Some analysts of Greco-Turkish relations argue that transformations in the internal dynamics also had considerable impact on the formulation of the foreign policies of Greece and Turkey towards one another. Greece started to practice democracy under civilian rule in 1974. Its membership to the EC in 1981 facilitated consolidation of the democratic government. In the Turkish case, there were several military interruptions during the Cold War years. These interruptions have created setbacks in Turkey's accession negotiations with the EC and consequently had negative implications for its democratic consolidation. Starting with the 1980s, Greece began to exploit its position in the EU as leverage against Turkey. Compared to the impact of the EU on democratic consolidation in both countries, this strategy of utilizing EU membership in the conduct of foreign policy towards Turkey has been more decisive in altering Greece's inferior position in bilateral relations.

⁶ "National Front" was the name of the coalition government established by the leader of Justice Party Süleyman Demirel.

⁷ Aydın, Mustafa, Ifantis, Kostas (2004), p. 26.

After the 1987 dispute over the Aegean continental shelf delimitations, the two sides tried to solve the disagreement through confidence building measures with the process initiated by the meeting of Prime Ministers Papandreou and Özal in Davos, Switzerland, in February 1988.⁸ A new *détente* phase was entered with this *modus vivendi*. *Détente* was momentary, given the reluctance of the successive Turkish and Greek governments to improve the Özal-Papandreou programme which was calling for developing relations in low-key politics. As Greek threat perceptions were transforming, similarly the way Turkey perceived its western neighbour has evolved through a growing confidence in Turkish military potency. Greece, on the other hand, was gradually becoming a soft power, largely due to its EU membership. The presence of NATO took care of the Hobbesian tendency of world politics in Europe and enabled the European states to focus more on European Economic Community (EEC) integration.⁹ Turkey, however, continued to improve its military capabilities with regard to threats to its security from the terrorist networks in the eastern regions and other threats coming from its troubled eastern and southern neighbourhoods. Hence, an asymmetry in terms of military power became increasingly visible, which further escalated the Greek perception of Turkey as threat to its national security. Furthermore, issues in the Aegean remained unresolved and confidence building measures initiated after the 1988 process seemed futile, as the Imia/Kardak crisis of 1996 demonstrated. The crisis brought Greece and Turkey to the brink of a war and tensions were reduced only after the phone calls by the US president and after the involvement of the general secretary of the NATO. All of these events demonstrate the fragility of the *détente* processes prior to 1999.

Is There a Break with the Past? Factors that Facilitate Recent *Détente*

Ups and downs in their bilateral relations make it obvious that it would be hard to break the deep-rooted conflictual cycle of interaction between Greece and Turkey. Nevertheless, some analysts argue that the post-1999 period seems to be distinct from the former periods of *détente*, on account of factors that recently facilitated an engagement between Greece and Turkey. Although most issues remain unresolved and without settlement, the process of the latest *détente* began to evolve into what we can call a *rapprochement*. However, the potential for the continuation of the recent engagement strategy of both Greece and Turkey towards one another in creating a lasting peace is fundamentally linked to their national security concerns. The critical question is whether the recent cooperative arrangements are more important to national security interests of Turkey and Greece than the continuation of the *status quo* in existing disputes that would best serve their interests.

Before all else one has to analyse the factors that have contributed to a fundamental change in Greco-Turkish relations in the aftermath of 1999 and which relatively sedated the burden of the past. Ahmet Evin argues that among many factors precipitating the latest *rapprochement*, some analysts mistakenly set too high a value on mutual sympathy that emerged on both sides after the earthquakes in Greece and Turkey.¹⁰ Since the Imia/Kardak crisis Greek-Turkish relations gradually deteriorated and the worsening of relations reached a culmination point when it came to light that the PKK (Kurdistan Workers Party) leader Abdullah Öcalan was

⁸ Koliopoulos, John S, Veremis, Thanos (2004), p. 321.

⁹ Müftüler-Bac, Meltem, “The European Union and its Common Defense and Security Policy”, Yannis A Stivachtis (eds.), in *State of the European Union*, London, Ashgate press (2007), p. 4

¹⁰ Evin, Ahmet, “The Future of Greek-Turkish Relations, in: Southeast European and Black Sea Studies”, vol. 5: 3, (2005), p. 396.

hiding in the Greek Embassy in Kenya.¹¹ PKK terrorism has been one of the main determinants of Turkish foreign policy since it constitutes the central threat to Turkey's security. Hence, the capture of the leader of this terrorist organization had interesting repercussions, in terms of revolutionizing the foreign policy making of both countries towards one another. The capture of Öcalan was a critical achievement for Turkey and it was, on the other hand, a shame for Greece. Three ministers resigned from the Greek cabinet and George Papandreou became the new foreign minister.

Changes in the Attitudes of the Political Leaders

In order to circumvent the emotional upset of the Öcalan crisis and its repercussions on mutual trust, the foreign minister of Turkey İsmail Cem sent a letter to Papandreou in May 1999 in which he outlined his views about improving bilateral relations and stated Turkey's stance towards terrorist organizations. He argued that Turkey and Greece should reach an agreement on how to combat terrorism, and he suggested that the settlement of this issue would help both sides to approach existing disputes with more trust.¹² Such an approach was echoed positively in Greece. Papandreou responded that Greece was gratified about Turkey's adherence to improvement of bilateral relations and that Greece was equally sincere in achieving results, and in this regard the two neighbours would cooperate on issues of culture, tourism, environment, crime, economy and ecological problems.¹³ Agreements in such issues of low-key politics are instrumental in increasing the soft power of both sides, and in augmenting economic prosperity in Greece and Turkey. Cooperative arrangements in low-key politics issues were also expected to diminish the mutual threat perception.

It is more advantageous for both sides to have stable and friendly neighbours than to exclude and contain the 'other'. Thus, the current availability of new options in the conduct of foreign policy – that is, the pursuit of confidence building measures - thanks to the efforts by foreign ministers of both sides has helped to transform the other's 'enemy identity' and would create longstanding attitudinal change. The fundamental implication of this change was that neither Greece nor Turkey considers any more that cooperation with the other side is the same as granting concessions on non-negotiable issues.

This attitudinal change also demonstrated itself in the flourishing personal relationship between the recent prime ministers of Greece and Turkey. Political dialogue between Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Kostas Karamanlis was positive from the start of their terms in office; especially on account of the positive environment created by Greek support for Turkey's campaign to start its EU accession negotiations at the Helsinki summit of 1999. Greek and Turkish diplomats also hold regular sessions in Athens and Ankara on a range of long-running disputes over sovereignty in the Aegean.¹⁴ However, on old thorny issues it is unrealistic to expect any revolutionary progress. Nevertheless, the EU membership prospects of Turkey, and Greece's changing position due to its integration in the EU, may provide a framework for settlement of some disputes over the Aegean - such as territorial waters - and would

¹¹ Ibid

¹² Aksu, Fuat, "Türk-Yunan İlişkilerinde Güvenlik ve Güven Arttırma Çabaları", in Cem Karadeli (eds) "Soğuk Savaş Sonrasında Avrupa ve Türkiye", pp. 242-275. Ankara: Ayraç Yayınları (2003)

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ "Mr Erdoğan's Greek Friend", in: *Economist*, vol. 372: 8388, (2004), p. 4.

encourage a step by step engagement and would lead eventually to opening to discussion of the old issues of contention.

Transformations in the impacts of the EU

As part of their national security interest and as a reflection of strategic foreign policy making, both Greece and Turkey have been committed to remain under the Western umbrella. However, as Bahar Rumelili argues, the EU failed to produce positive effect on Greek-Turkish relations until 1999.¹⁵ Although both Turkey and Greece were part of the Western alliance from the 1950s onwards, the EU was inadequate in providing a framework for the two neighbours to reconcile their disputes. It was rather the individual efforts of Greece and Turkey to prevent the other side from complicating the relationship with the EU. One example of this was the Annual Meeting of the World Economic Summit in Davos which led to a short period of détente between Greece and Turkey after 1988. Rumelili argues that this pursuit of Turkey to engage in dialogue with Greece and subsequent improvement in bilateral relations was necessary to prevent the Greek veto on Turkey's application for membership in the European Community (EC).¹⁶ However, such initiatives prior to 1999 were limited in achieving lasting results and were only temporary tactical moves.

Recently, Greece has endeavoured to catch up with EU integration and Turkey is seeking EU membership, and making very strong efforts to conclude its accession negotiations. The EU has stated that it will not grant any membership to countries who have unresolved border disputes. Hence, Turkey is truly sensitive about the fact that its road to EU membership depends on resolution of its disputes with Greece and with the Republic of Cyprus, which became a member of the EU in 2004. Europeanization of their foreign policies, and long term strategic commitment to the EU, are among the fundamental changes that have impacted Greco-Turkish relations in the aftermath of 1999. With the lifting of its longstanding veto on granting Turkey candidate status in the Helsinki summit of December 1999, Greece showed an essential break with its past foreign policy making towards Turkey. "...The Helsinki council decisions have also established the peaceful resolution of outstanding border disputes as a community principle and urged the candidate states 'to make every effort' to resolve any outstanding disputes, and if these efforts fail, to bring the dispute before the International Court of Justice."¹⁷ As Ahmet Evin observes, a stable Turkey totally absorbed in Europe also became part of Greece's long-term strategic objectives.¹⁸

Thus, Greece's support of Turkey's EU membership and its modernization efforts stems mainly from the new articulation of Greece's national security interest in line with EU objectives - that is, to enhance democratization in its neighbourhood and stabilization in a wider regional level. Its further integration into the EU made Greece more oriented towards becoming a 'soft security power', through achievements in the areas of economy and low-key political areas such as culture. Hence, a policy of engagement began to supersede the policy of deterrence towards Turkey. Despite Greece's future target of incorporating Turkey into the EU, Greek reservations about the disputes over the Aegean and Cyprus will carry on shaping Turkey's recent membership negotiations with the EU.

¹⁵ Rumelili, Bahar, "The European Union's Impact on the Greek-Turkish Conflict", in: "EU Border Conflicts Studies", University of Birmingham, Occasional Paper 6, (2004), p. 5.

¹⁶ Ibid, p. 7

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 9

¹⁸ Evin, Ahmet, (2005), p. 398.

Continuing Issues of Contention

The issue of the Cyprus dispute between Greece and Turkey ranks first in encumbering Turkey's negotiation process with the EU. At the Council meeting on General Affairs in December, 2007, it was decided to suspend the opening and closure of negotiations on eight chapters with Turkey until Turkey fulfils its commitments towards Cyprus. Turkey was asked by the EU to open its harbours and ports to trade with the Greek Cypriots as part of Turkey's Customs Union liabilities and obligations. Turkey rebuffed this dictate of the EU and stated that it would not open its harbours and ports unless the isolation of the northern Cypriots is lifted. With reference to the EU commitments following the Referendum on the Annan Plan on April 24, 2004, Turkey demanded the EU first fulfil its responsibilities for the advancement of the economic position of the Turkish Cypriots, before demanding that Turkey open its harbours and ports to the Republic of Cyprus. Such incidents have led to a continuous war of attrition between Turkey and the EU as Turkey still pursues tactical moves in order to achieve its national security interests. Some speculate whether these links between the Cyprus problem and Turkey's negotiation process with the EU will force Turkey to take further steps in the resolution of the Cyprus dispute, if it seriously wants to become a member of the union. Hence, it can be argued that disputes between Greece, the Republic of Cyprus and Turkey have been Europeanized, to the disadvantage of Turkey, with the accession of Greece to the EU in 1981 and then the accession of the Cyprus Republic in 2004. This state of affairs makes Greek-Turkish understanding harder to maintain. Unless a new system that will guarantee the security of Turkish Cypriots is established, withdrawal of Turkish troops from the island will be viewed as a security threat by the Turkish Cypriots. Yet, reduction of the size of the Turkish military presence in the island through new security arrangements would constitute a win-win situation for all the parties involved. The nature of the recent dialogue between Karamanlis and Erdoğan gives the impression that they will not let Cyprus cast a shadow over the further promotion and pursuance of measures that facilitate the rapprochement.

Do the domestic publics play any role?

Many observers are indecisive about the effects of changing dynamics in the domestic environments of Greece and Turkey, that is to say the effects of changing public demands on the long term commitment of governments to the process of rapprochement. If the measures taken by the two sides to deepen rapprochement are instrumental in the achievement of long-standing foreign policy objectives, then it would be unthinkable that Greece and Turkey will resort to their previous foreign policies of deterrence. Nevertheless, the bellicosity of public opinion has been increased significantly with the habit of emotional responses in the instances of past disputes. Some argue that as the easily broken détente such as the 'Davos process' suggests, many initiatives to start a dialogue between Turkey and Greece were abandoned because of the lack of public support. I argue instead that it was not the volatile public opinion on both sides which brought the détente processes to a halt, but rather the non-existence of foreign policy objectives that would help maintain friendly relations between Greece and Turkey. Thus, the post-1999 redefinition of security interests on both sides evidently leaves no room for concerns about the influence of public opinion on the exacerbation of disputes. As previously discussed in this paper, some observers erroneously argued that the earthquakes changed the public opinions in Greece and Turkey and created an aura of compassion for the populace of the other side of the Aegean. This paper argues that, rather than the 'seismic

diplomacy', it was the emergence of clear security interests that led both sides to realize the importance of achieving deepened cooperation in the post-1999 period.

Redefinition of security interests

Recently, Greece has a clear interest in the progress of its integration into the EU, and Turkey is looking for membership in the Union. Hence, as noted above, the disputes between Greece and Turkey gradually became Europeanized. The EU impact on Greco-Turkish bilateral relations, details of which have already been discussed, stands as the most central aspect of both sides' security considerations and will observably continue to determine the future of Greco-Turkish relations. The formation of common identities under the EU umbrella, and more importantly the effects of this development on the convergence of the foreign policy interests of Greece and Turkey, are positive for the continuation of recent rapprochement.

Turkey historically has numerous geopolitical concerns, whereas Greece has conventionally been preoccupied with its relations with Turkey.¹⁹ Since both Turkey and Greece became embedded in the EU, their strategic interests began to converge. However, as Ian Lesser argues, traditional issues of bilateral conflict may rise all over again if Turkish-EU relations collapse.²⁰ Conventional politics will continue to constitute the main determinant of the future bilateral dialogue between Greece and Turkey. Yet, opening of new channels of communication, especially through economic cooperation, would prevent any comprehensive deterioration of bilateral relations. Especially after 1999, positive effects of confidence-building measures began to be felt and were expanded through a set of initiatives. Foreign ministers Dora Bakoyannis and Abdullah Gül agreed on specific measures for further strengthening of relations in June, 2006.²¹ They agreed that cooperation should continue between the two countries in the energy, economic and banking sectors. Abdullah Gül, later the Turkish President, has routinely said that "The glass of water in Greek-Turkish relations is more than half full and we will try to fill it."²²

More importantly, Greece and Turkey recently began to engage in high level military contacts as part of new confidence-building measures. As part of this initiative, Dora Bakoyannis stated that the armed forces of the two neighbours will expand military visits, conduct joint missions in NATO-disaster assistance efforts and overseas peacekeeping duties.²³ This military exchange and cooperation is an essential component of both countries' national security interests. Such developments are helpful in incrementally furthering the rapprochement between Turkey and Greece.

Greek-Turkish ties were also bolstered when in October, 2007 leaders of the two countries opened a pipeline project that will carry natural gas from Central Asia to western Europe, connecting Azerbaijan and Italy by 2012.²⁴ The pipeline project also serves the security

¹⁹ Lesser, Ian O., "Greece's New Geopolitical Environment", in: *Journal of Southeast European & Black Sea Studies*, vol. 5: 3, (2005), p. 349.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 350

²¹ "Greek, Turkish FMs Discuss Confidence Building Measures", source: Athens News Agency, accessible through the Official Website of Embassy of Greece in Washington, DC (2006)

²² "Greek, Turkish FMs Discuss Confidence Building Measures", (2006), source: Athens News Agency, accessible through the Official Website of Embassy of Greece in Washington, DC

²³ "Yunanistan ve Türkiye Askeri Bağları Arttıracak", (2007), accessible through the official website of Stratejik Boyut

²⁴ *Ibid.*

interests of both countries, and once initiated it will become harder for Turkey and Greece to step back from this area of cooperation.

A 50 % increase in trade volume between Greece and Turkey in 2007 is a clear indicator of the strengthening of bilateral relations on economic issues.²⁵ The recent foreign minister of Turkey Ali Babacan has stated that "In certain sectors such as energy and banking, Greece has become our No. 1 partner."²⁶

Conclusions: Is Lasting Peace Possible?

The recent nature of the bilateral relationship between Greece and Turkey is different from the previous state of affairs on account of a multiplicity of factors. Orientation towards cooperation, and the gradual abolition of strategic competition in a number of areas, suggests that the security interests of Greece and Turkey are converging. The realist theory of international relations assumes that as rational strategic actors Turkey and Greece consider their foreign policy alternatives and choose among these alternatives after evaluation of each of their options in a cost-benefit analysis. According to realism, Turkey or Greece would not follow any policy that would minimize their strategic interests. Common policies in an ever expanding issue agenda are adopted since all of these issues serve the security interests of both Turkey and Greece. Every successful step in these issues of low-key politics and flourishing economic cooperation contribute to cooperation in issues of high-level politics, as the enhancing high level military contacts have shown. During his visit to Selanik for the meeting of Balkan countries' Chiefs of Armed Forces, Yaşar Büyükanıt, Chief of Turkish Armed Forces, stated that "No one would presume that the countries who fight one another will finally establish the EU. Some day we will also overcome these problems."²⁷

Yet, Turkey has broader national security considerations about the issues of Cyprus and the Aegean. These unresolved conflicts have the potential to lead to a deterioration of relations and continue to pose threats to the continuation of engagement strategies by Turkey and Greece. Stalemate in the Cyprus dispute also negatively impacts Turkey's EU membership negotiations. Any frustration in Turkey's relations with the EU would not have direct implications on Greco-Turkish relations, but would lead to redefinition of the strategic interests and strategies of Turkey and hence would weaken Turkey's orientation towards a rapprochement with Greece.

²⁵“Yunanistan ve Türkiye Askeri Bağları Arttıracak”, (2007), accessible through the official website of Stratejik Boyut

²⁶ Ibid

²⁷ Şık, Barkın, “Türk Yunan İlişisine AB’yi Örnek Gösterdi”, (2007), accessible through <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/2007/04/20/siyaset/axsiy02.html>