

Greece: The EU's Anchor of Stability in a Troubled Region

Despite being a small state, with some ten million citizens, Greece will play a major role in anchoring the future stability and prosperity of Southeast Europe and the eastern Mediterranean. Greece is uniquely positioned to play such a role. It has exhibited a record of democratic stability unmatched by any neighboring state; it is the region's most affluent country and its only member of the European Union (EU).

As a fully integrated European state, Greece is playing its part in facing such twenty-first-century challenges as globalization, technological change, environmental degradation, and organized crime. However, the problems of Southeast Europe are in certain respects more traditional and involve age-old issues of nationalism, peace, and security. Greece's history and geographic location give it unique standing to assist in the Europeanization of the Balkans and bring them into a common future of prosperity. Central to this new approach is a regional strategy based on the three pillars: sanctity of national borders, peaceful resolution of disputes, and expansion of the EU's membership and activities.

As Greece's imminent entry into the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) suggests, our chief priority for the coming decade should be to seek further integration within the EU. Greece's mission should be to become an anchor of stability in the Balkans, actively contributing to the prosperity and security of Southeast Europe by promoting regional cooperation in reconstruction and development. At the same time, Greece could work out a modus vivendi with Turkey that guarantees Greece's sovereign rights and

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The Washington Quarterly • 23:2 pp. 7-11.

THE WASHINGTON QUARTERLY ■ SPRING 2000

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the external security of all its citizens. Fulfilling this role requires vision, leadership, precise planning and strict adherence to basic principles of international law. Although some of these issues will be contested in Greece's upcoming parliamentary elections, the commitment to stability, human rights, and development are accepted by all. By the same token, proposed institutional improvements, such as the establishment of a National Council on Foreign and Defense Policy, are likely to provide a much-needed degree of bipartisanship in the formulation of Greece's international presence.

The EU, Turkey, and the Cyprus Issue

Greek accession in 1981 to the European Community (EC) was, to a considerable extent, the achievement of the statesmanship of former Greek president, the late Konstantinos Karamanlis. Unfortunately since then, considerable delays have attended the process of the country's integration within the EU. Greece remains firmly committed to European integration in all its dimensions. As its economy grows stronger, and as a result of its imminent membership in EMU, Greece will be able to participate fully in all major initiatives, thus deepening the process of its European integration.

Greece wholeheartedly supports the ongoing enlargement of the EU. The process of accession to full-membership status constitutes the ultimate incentive to eligible states emerging from a half-century of communism or experiencing difficulty with human rights and democratization. In turn, the EU will have a mechanism for monitoring the progress of reform in these prospective member countries.

The adoption of the euro by a number of EU countries should be followed by strengthened political elements of European integration. In practical terms, this means that the EU's international role must be upgraded. The Common Foreign and Security Policy should be further complemented with better-coordinated defense capabilities. The recent decision at the Helsinki European Council to create an EU rapid-deployment military capability consisting of 50,000 to 60,000 soldiers by 2003 is welcome progress. Greece should actively participate in the development of this military capability, which will probably entail a wider representation of EU members than that of the Eurocorps. The development of an autonomous EU defense capability should be pursued in parallel and consistent with North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) obligations. Although decision making and planning within these new European structures should not necessarily be shared with non-EU countries, mechanisms could be developed to ensure that the process runs smoothly.

The settlement of the Cyprus problem is a high priority for Greece and an

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essential component to long-lasting improvement in Greek-Turkish relations. After all, the perception of a military threat from Turkey has dominated Greek public debate and security planning since the 1974 Cyprus crisis. In a post-Cold War world that has recently shown such a keen interest in opposing the displacement of peoples (a policy supported by Greece during NATO's intervention in Yugoslavia), the military occupation currently in place in the northern part of Cyprus needs a viable resolution. Ten years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the last dividing wall in Europe still stands in Cyprus.

An enlarged EU should also include the Republic of Cyprus. Cyprus is a democratic state with consistently high economic growth. In fact, it is already close to meeting the criteria for EMU entry. Its commitment to European values and political stability make it an excellent candidate for membership. The recent Helsinki European Council seems to effectively guarantee Cyprus' accession to the EU, without making a political settlement on the future of the island a precondition. This was considered a breakthrough for Cyprus' European future and a minimal concession by Turkey for facilitating its road to future EU membership.

All major political parties in Greece support a European future and perspective for Turkey. Stability and normal relations between Greece and Turkey are vital goals that must be based on principled actions that include the withdrawal of territorial claims, the renunciation of the threat or use of force, and respect for international law and treaties. These basic principles provide the rationale behind Greece's ongoing perception of security threats in the region.

Seeking Stability in Southeast Europe

Perhaps the most positive and innovative contribution Greece can make as an EU member is in serving as the anchor of a strategy of stability and regional cooperation in Southeast Europe. Greece is uniquely positioned to do this. It is the only country in the region with membership in the EU, NATO, the Western European Union, and other major international organizations. Indeed, the EU's recent decision to locate the Agency for the Reconstruction of Southeast Europe in the port city of Thessaloniki, Greece's second largest, underscores this fact. Thessaloniki's strategic location in northern Greece—its proximity to Tirana, Pristina, Belgrade, Skopje, and Sofia—has restored to this city a whole new dimension as the historic gateway to the Balkans. The city's tremendous potential in the areas of trade and the economic development of the region should be both appreciated and explored.

But unless certain clear guidelines are followed, spillover effects from

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Kosovo will have a destabilizing impact on the wider region. The fragile ethnic balance of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia has been strained, raising the question of its long-term stability. At the same time, the realities created on the ground in Kosovo could bolster the confidence and actions of the proponents of a Greater Albania. If NATO's intervention led to the unification of Albania with Kosovo, this would almost certainly lead to a situation in which irredentism, border revisionism, and the cannibalization of neighboring states become the driving force in the region, a trend that Greece strongly opposes.

Greece's mission should be to become an anchor of stability in the Balkans.

The recent conflicts in Bosnia and Kosovo provided an illustration of how peace cannot be taken for granted in the Balkans. The aftermath of the war provides an excellent opportunity to implement principles that Greece espouses for the region. A basic triad of principles should be observed:

1) Existing borders must remain intact. Ethnic problems must not translate into redrawing of any borders in the region. The redrawing of existing frontiers is a factor of instability likely to make things worse, rather than better. With a historical perspective of this region, it is evident that any redrawing of state boundaries could be lethally destabilizing for the Balkans and could provoke further conflict. The international community should seriously reconsider the wisdom of a series of recent or planned measures that are actually pushing toward the de facto independence of Kosovo, and hence to its ultimate secession from Yugoslavia.

2) Democratization and political/economic reform are key. Genuine democratization and political/economic reform and the abandoning of nationalistic concepts are crucial to a peaceful and prosperous future for the Balkans. To avoid future confrontations such as Kosovo, gaps between ethnic groups should be bridged through economic growth and investment in social capital. A major contribution can be made by intercultural cooperation, by the media, and by projects in education. Economic and technical assistance to be channeled through the Stability Pact should require that multiethnic tolerance and a deep respect for human rights and democracy be reflected in all activities and processes.

3) EU planning, coordination, and funding are vital. Europe's concerted effort to deal with the lessons and consequences of the Kosovo conflict will require a well-funded, long-term effort that will be at least as complex and difficult as the one pursued by the international community in Bosnia-Herzegovina. A valuable proposal was recently adopted by the European

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People's Party (EPP) focusing upon the potentially significant regional role of the Southeastern Europe Cooperation Process.¹ This flexible cooperation initiative (whose Secretariat should be located in Thessaloniki, for the reasons discussed above) could be reformulated according to emerging needs and as its scope and focus expands. For example, it could in due course incorporate the EU Commission as a full member, and even include the Southeast European Defense Ministers' initiative.

Greek-American Relations: A Partnership in Regional Stability

The United States and Greece have a long-standing common interest in encouraging stability and democratization, both in Southeast Europe and in the eastern Mediterranean region. Greece welcomes the interest of the United States to promote stability in the eastern Mediterranean and to facilitate a lasting improvement in Greek-Turkish relations, as well as the reactivation of shuttle diplomacy on the Cyprus issue. However, important past misunderstandings have unintentionally contributed to feelings of disappointment and further insecurity among the Greek Cypriots. Pressure for change must be exerted symmetrically and therefore primarily upon those responsible for the long-standing impasse in the Cyprus problem.

The U.S.-Greek bilateral economic relationship still lags behind its full potential and should be strengthened. Some concrete steps toward achieving this goal that could readily be implemented would be joint ventures in Southeast Europe in various fields such as trade, telecommunications, and the exploitation of energy resources.

Greece looks forward to building a stronger relationship with the United States in order to strengthen Southeast Europe in the twenty-first century. Greece will rely on this relationship, as well as its own strategic position in the region, to advocate wider representation of Southeast Europe in the EU.

Note

1. *Stability and Reconstruction Plan for Southeast Europe: Guidelines for Action*. The report was adopted by the European People's Party (EPP) Council on September 30, 1999.

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