

# The Incomplete Breakthrough in Greek–Turkish Relations

Grasping Greece's Socialization Strategy

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Greek interests regarding its dispute with Turkey as well as the Cyprus issue. Simply put, the more Turkey's relations with the EU were upgraded, the more demanding Greece's prerequisites for conceding to the upgrading of Turkey's relationship with the EU would become.<sup>194</sup> Confronted by serious external pressure, this was indeed the first time Greek decision-makers had embarked upon a conscious elaboration of a brand new strategy vis-à-vis Turkey; a strategy that could transform Greece's dispute with Turkey into an EU-Turkey one.

Actually it was in late 1997 that the rationale of the new strategy was presented in a clear and straightforward way by key decision-makers in the Greek Parliament as the only comprehensive and credible response to the "Turkish issue" and as the only one able to provide Greece with solutions both to its long-standing conflict with Turkey and to the intractable Cyprus problem.<sup>195</sup> Although well elaborated since 1997, Greece's new strategy remained in abeyance in terms of its implementation throughout the period leading up to 1999. The persistence of the dominance of an "underdog national culture" and Turkey's counterproductive stance on its relations with Greece had not been the only reasons the new strategy had been "on hold" for a period of almost three years. Most importantly, advocates of Greece's new strategy were confronted with a serious difficulty in matching up contradicting foreign policy decisions.

Greece's initiation in early 1997 of a "step-by-step" approach towards Turkey through the establishment of a dialogue between Greece and Turkey on issues of "low politics"<sup>196</sup> seemed to make a "strange bedfellow" with Greece's backing of the Greek-Cypriot government decision to sign a deal some time earlier for the order of a S-300 PMU-1 anti-aircraft missile system to be installed within the area controlled by the Greek Cypriots.<sup>197</sup> It was indeed hard to see how the positive development regarding the dialogue between Greece and Turkey on low politics issues – initiated after almost a decade since the last hectic collaboration of the Greek and the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs on certain low politics issues (animated by the short-lived "Davos spirit" in 1988) – could pair with the negative climate of verbal offensives and counteroffensives due to Cyprus' purchase and planned deployment of the Russian missiles.

It is worth noting that the issue of the purchase and deployment of the Russian-made missile system in Cyprus constituted the most characteristic example of the internal clash which existed within the ranks of the Greek government from 1996 until 1998, among those key decision-makers on foreign policy issues who happened to be the main candidates of the governing party's, and Greece's, leadership in early 1996.<sup>198</sup> The key representative of Greece's new agentic culture, premier Costas Simitis, had not been hesitant to question the Joint [Greece-Cyprus] Defence Doctrine (JDD), arguing for the replacement of the notorious strategic coupling of the "joint defense area" with a "joint economic area."<sup>199</sup> Although not a strong believer in the

doctrine, Simitis had not, however, openly opposed the doctrine's operationalization after his coming into office.<sup>200</sup>

In early 1997, with the doctrine in place – although more an exercise on paper than an applicable reality – advocates of Greece's new strategy towards Turkey were faced with the unravelling of a "Gordian knot." Indeed, they should not only match up the consequences of the purchase and deployment of the missile system with the parallel process of a Greek-Turkish dialogue on "low-politics" issues, but also, most importantly, pair the "militarization" of the Cyprus issue – due to the purchase of the S-300 missiles – with its "politicization," namely Cyprus' European accession process, the paramount goal of Greece's new strategy.<sup>201</sup>

At the bilateral level, two other decisions taken by Greece in mid-1997 were mostly viewed by Greek decision-makers as useful gestures of goodwill – aiming either at picturing Greece as a country favoring dialogue and stable relations with its neighbors or at strengthening Greece's international and European standing – rather than as integral parts of a broader strategy aiming at the resolution of its dispute with Turkey (Simitis, 2005: 88–9).<sup>202</sup> The first concerned an initiative taken by the United States and NATO in May 1997 regarding a set of confidence-building measures (CBMs), which Greece and Turkey could adopt and apply in the Aegean. With the aim of keeping the temperature at the lowest level possible and in order to be able to check Turkey's perceived revisionist policy in the Aegean, Greece accepted two of the five proposals, namely the monitoring by NATO of Greek and Turkish military flights over the Aegean and the extension of the moratorium on military exercises. The NATO-made CBMs had soon proved unable to serve even the short-term goal regarding the reduction of tension in the Aegean.<sup>203</sup>

The second Greek foreign policy decision regards the so-called Madrid Declaration, signed by Greece and Turkey in July 1997 in the backstage of the Madrid NATO Summit and under US pressure.<sup>204</sup> It is worth noting that, in contrast to the Greek agentic culture, the agreement did not state that the differences between Greece and Turkey were to be solved according to international law. Neither did it make any reference to the ICJ or any other judicial organ.<sup>205</sup> In that sense, the Madrid Declaration was not fully incorporated in – or it even constituted a deviation from – the comprehensive strategy Greece's agentic culture had envisioned. Furthermore, the Madrid Declaration was considered as preparing the ground for a major shift in Greece's traditional policy to consider the delimitation of the continental shelf as the only difference between Greece and Turkey, which should be resolved through recourse to the ICJ.<sup>206</sup>

Coupled with a strong internal criticism by certain MPs of the governing party, who pointed to the concessions the government had made over Greece's sovereign rights in the Aegean,<sup>207</sup> the Madrid Declaration remained – although it initially appeared as a positive development in the

establishment of a crisis prevention mechanism. See Declaration adopted by the fifteen Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the EU at the General Affairs Council on July 15, 1996, Brussels, SN 3543/96. Needless to say, the only result of the normative pressure exerted by these two prominent EU organs and the EU Council on the conflict was the further justification of the dominant perception in the Turkish elite, namely that the EU was being captured by Greece. See Rumelili (2004b: 13). The official acknowledgement by the EU on the jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice in The Hague had been an issue of paramount importance for the Greek decision-makers, and it was assessed as a major achievement of Greece's foreign policy vis-à-vis Turkey. See Simitis's remarks in Parliamentary Minutes (December 1997: 2822).

190. See Office of the Press, Office of the Prime Minister of Greece, December 4, 1996.
191. Author's interview with Christos Rozakis. Greece's former premier Costas Simitis states that Greece's new strategy towards Turkey "started being implemented after 1997." See *ibid.*, p. 86. Empirical findings do not, however, seem to verify this point. It would be more accurate to argue that Greece's new strategy towards Turkey started being elaborated more thoroughly in 1997, when it was made evident to Greek decision-makers that the traditional policies Greece followed vis-à-vis Turkey proved ineffective, if not counterproductive, although certain domestic, bilateral, and regional prerequisites for the strategy's adoption were still lacking.
192. The Turkish pressure on the EU for granting it a candidacy status had been coupled with veiled threats that Turkey's exclusion from the EU's enlargement project would have certain negative repercussions on NATO's enlargement project.
193. As noted, Greece's agentic culture already highlighted, in the wake of the Imia crisis, the need for a reorientation of Greece's strategy towards Turkey, while it also described, although in a general form, the basic goals and means of this strategy. It was, however, the pressure coming from developments in the European Union in view of the EU's next enlargement phase, most notably certain EU members' interest for upgrading EU-Turkey relations, which created an immediate need for a forthcoming and productive, instead of a defensive and negative, Greek stance on the future of Greek-Turkish relations. Author's interview with Christos Rozakis.
194. The positions of certain EU members, namely Great Britain, France, and Germany, along with the Commission's views on the upgrading of EU-Turkey relations, were presented and assessed in a confidential document released on March 4, 1997 by a high official of the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs, who happened to have been playing a prominent role in all the phases of the elaboration and implementation of Greece's new strategy towards Turkey. Interestingly, the document – which triggered the genesis of an intense debate among high officials in the Greek MFA – proposed a U-turn in Greece's traditional policy vis-à-vis Turkey by suggesting Greece's concession to the upgrading of Turkey's role (through the lifting of its veto on Turkey's closer relations with the EU) under the condition that Greece will "...link the eventual upgrading of EU-Turkey relations with the normalization of relations between Greece and Turkey." Furthermore, the document argued that in the event that British ideas for granting Turkey – along with other Southeast European states, namely Romania, Bulgaria, and Slovakia – the status of a "special relationship" with the EU were to prevail, Greece should link its concession to a more demanding set

of prerequisites, mostly related to certain Greek interests, such as the obligation of Greece and Turkey to submit their differences in the jurisdiction of the ICJ in The Hague, the resolution of the Greek-Turkish dispute on the basis of an agreed schedule, the inclusion of the issue regarding protection of human rights in Turkey into the "preaccession process" that would be set up for Turkey, and the resolution of the Cyprus issue in accordance with the UNSC resolution and within a particular timeframe. Surprisingly, the core of the forthcoming ideas presented in this document became the central elements of Greece's new strategy, which reached its climax in the EU summit decisions at Helsinki in December 1999.

195. For a detailed presentation of the rationale of Greece's new strategy towards Turkey, see the remarks made by the then Alternate Minister of Foreign Affairs, George Papandreou, in Parliamentary Minutes (December 1997: 2840–5).
196. See Simitis (2005: 86) based on proposals made by the then Secretary General for European Affairs, Yannis Kranidiotis.
197. The Cyprus government announced its decision to purchase the Russian-made missile system on January 6, 1997 after a recommendation made – according to the Greek-Cypriot leader Glafkos Clerides – by the then Greek Minister of Defense, Yerasimos Arsenis. In addition, during the negotiations between the Cypriot government and the Russian defense company over the purchase of the missile system, namely from March to December 1996, premier Simitis was not personally involved in the said decision, nor was the Ministry of Foreign Affairs called upon to express its support over the Greek-Cypriot government decision to purchase the system. See Konstantinos Angelopoulos, "The Clear Responsibility of Athens," *Kathimerini*, December 20, 1998.
198. The Prime Minister Costas Simitis, Yerasimos Arsenis, Minister of Defense (January 1996–September 1998), and Akis Tsohatzopoulos, Minister of Defense (September 1998–April 2000). Unlike Arsenis and Tsohatzopoulos, the then Minister of Foreign Affairs, Theodore Pangalos, seemed also to be a member of the camp of the skeptics over the usefulness of the Joint Defense Doctrine. See Yannis Kartalis, "Time for Decisions," *To Vima*, November 22, 1998: A34.
199. See Costas Simitis's speech on September 19, 1995 in Lefkosia, Cyprus, as cited in Triantafyllos Dravaliaris, "By the Simitis hand, through the mouth of advisors," *Imerisia*, December 22, 2002: 6. In that speech Simitis also stresses that "...[c]ertain political figures insist that the solution of the Cyprus problem should precede Cyprus's accession to the European Union. Our efforts should be directed towards the tipping of that thesis."
200. Konstantinos Angelopoulos, "Obsessions and Exercises of Memory," *Kathimerini*, February 7, 1999.
201. See Kostis Fafoutis, "Advantages and Problems from the Deployment of the S-300 Missiles," *Kathimerini*, January 3, 1999. Also Nikos Marakis, "United Nations change the Route of the Missiles," *To Vima*, December 25–7, 1998: A16.
202. Also former premier Simitis's interview with the author.
203. The other three CBMs proposed, but rejected by Greece, regarded the disarming of military aircraft taking part in training flights; the use of the IFF/SIF electronic system for the identification of aircraft in order to avoid engagement; and the setting up of a center for direct communication between Greece and Turkey. See Syrigos (1998: 374–6).
204. Interestingly, the Madrid Declaration or Communiqué was issued as a statement by the US Department of State, and it was entitled: "Meeting of Secretary of