



THE REFUGEE CRISIS AND ITS EFFECTS ON GREECE'S EUROPEAN INTEGRATION AND RELATIONS WITH TURKEY

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ABSTRACT

In the realm of the recent refugee crisis, latent euroscepticism has once again become highly topical in Greece, as many Greeks feel abandoned by their European partners in controlling irregular migration and providing protection to people in need. Moreover, the country's membership in the European Community and its subsequent participation in the European Union has always been considered as an additional security guarantee against Turkey. However, under EU-pressure, the Greek state submitted to a large extent with regard to the refugee-migrant issue in terms of guarding its borders and managing the hot spots on the eastern Aegean islands. For example, Greece consented to NATO patrols in the Aegean aiming to stem the flow of refugees. This decision, whose terms were agreed with Ankara on 25 February 2016, has proven very unpopular given an array of actions undertaken by the Turkish State intending to dispute Greece's territorial and air space sovereignty over a part of the Aegean Sea. The paper examines the current anti-European trends within Greek society, their origins, as well as Greece's course within the EU immigration policy framework. It also attempts to answer the question of whether the Greek State is able to address the daunting and existential significance of the refugee-immigration challenge and to analyse the possible impact the recent geopolitical developments in the Eastern Mediterranean might have on the EU-Greek Relations and Greek-Turkish relations.

Keywords: EU-Greek relations, Refugees, NATO, Greek-Turkish Security Problems, Euroscepticism

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Greece's Bizarre Relationship with The European Integration Project

It is widely known that the image a country projects beyond its borders is of crucial importance. It is also known that in recent years, Greece's image has been enormously tarnished, as the country is still struggling to avoid a total default and to overcome the stigma of what political scientists have called a 'failing' or even 'semi-failed' state. Indeed, in an intriguing article in 2012¹, Robert Kaplan raised the serious question of whether Greece is European at all. According to Kaplan, Greece's economic and political development bear marks of a legacy inconsistent with modern western European standards. And yet, Kaplan's question is not an anti-Hellenic one, but reflects the various stereotypes about Greeks that have been spread in recent years. The most typical one is the misperception about the role that corruption really plays in social, political and economic life. Many analysts stereotypically describe Greece not as a well-functioning state that has been corrupted by certain illegal practices, but rather as a state run by rules those corrupt practices have constituted. Furthermore, it is generally believed that the Greek state repeatedly and disturbingly violated the relevant norms the European Union is, naturally, driven by; now, in the context of the 'existential' crises for the EU due to the influx of refugees, Greece has once again proven incapable of meeting its obligations towards the other European Union member states.

However, things are more complicated than those simplistic interpretations might suggest. Indeed, one could argue that there is a plethora of features in the Greek economic and political reality that might differ from the advanced western European societies. The most prominent among them are clientelism and the absence of meritocratic social and economic development due to the entanglement between the state, political parties, and business. These conditions particularly hampered the rise and establishment of a self-sufficient and enlightened bourgeois class. Furthermore, political parties have often been family businesses in the past, while the

1 Robert Kaplan, "Is Greece European?", *Stratfor*, 6 June 2012.

party in power not only dominated the highest rank of the bureaucracy - as is normal and proper in a Western democracy- but the middle and lower ranks as well.²

Greek accession to the European Economic Community (EEC) aimed at overcoming that social and political mischief. In 1961, Greece was the first country to sign an Association Agreement with the EEC, and in 1975, the Greek government applied for full membership in order to promote the ambitious political project of a European-oriented liberal bourgeois society.³ (It joined in 1981 as the EEC's tenth member.)

However, the structural deficiencies turned out to be stronger than the effect of europeanisation. Initially, the European Community (and later the European Union) was highly appreciated in Greece following the inception of the Integrated Mediterranean Programs and the 'Cohesion' funds that considerably benefited Greece, while at the same time allowing the parties to maintain their clientele. While the anti-EC rhetoric of some political parties dominated the political discourse in the 1970's, it had all but disappeared by the mid-1980s. It was then replaced by the opinion that Greece should fight a different kind of 'battle' in Brussels, seeking to extract maximum funds from the EC necessary to keep the Greek economy afloat and sustain the unrealistically high standard of living particularly pursued since 1981. Nevertheless, those subsidies did not contribute to the state's overall efficiency, as Greece had a poor record in the transposition of the EU's single market rules and a high rate of infringement cases.⁴

2 For further information, please refer to Nicos Mouzelis, *Modern Greece: Facets of Underdevelopment*, (London: Macmillan Press, 1978) and Konstantinos Tsoukalas, *Social development and State*, (Athens: Themelio Publisher, 1993), 5th edition, in Greek.

3 Susannah Verney, "The Greek Association with the European Community: A Strategy of State", in A. Costa-Pinto and N. Teixeira (Eds.), *Southern Europe and the Making of the European Union* (Columbia University Press: New York, 2002), pp. 109-156; Michael Tsinisizelis, "Greece in the European Union. A Political/Institutional Balance Sheet", in Secretariat General of Information for the Greek Government (Ed.), *Greece in the European Union: The New Role & the New Agenda*, (Athens: Ministry of Press and Mass Media, 2002), pp. 64-74.

4 Maria Rammata, *Contemporary Greek Public Administration*, (Athens: Kritiki

As a result, the Greek economy suffered from debilitated competitiveness leading to a ballooning of the public and private debt. According to an assessment by Bertelsmann Stiftung,⁵ Greece achieved the smallest integration induced income in the period between 1992 and 2012 compared to all other EU member states. Between 1992 and 2009, the value of the Greek integration index rose from 47,6 to 64,2. At the end of the evaluation period (2012), it dropped to 33,9 index points.

Greece's bankruptcy in 2010 not only revealed the structural deficiencies of its state and private economy, but discredited the political-economic establishment that had managed the destiny of the country over the last decades. Furthermore, the crisis overshadowed the credibility of the European Union as an institution per se, as Greeks came to believe that EU subsidies and funds only benefited a small part of Greek society, particularly due to the influence of populist rhetoric. Many began overtly questioning core features of the process of integration, such as the gradual sharing of competences and even the country's Eurozone membership, calling for the retention of national sovereignty or independence. A general feeling of externally imposed injustice began to take root within Greek society, undermining both the legitimacy of the parliamentary democracy as a system and the usefulness of the country's membership in the European Union and Eurozone.

This increasing disbelief in the European Integration process, or euroscepticism, has been demonstrated in a number of surveys aimed at measuring the perception of the benefits of integration. Surveys have shown an increasing disbelief in whether country gained real profits from its participation in the European Integration process.⁶ One example is an analysis

Publisher, 2011), in Greek, pp. 254-257; Kevin Faetherstone and Dimitris Papadimitriou, *The Limits of Europeanization: Reform Capacity and Policy Conflict in Greece*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. 57-58.

5 Bertelsmann Stiftung, *20 Years of the European Single Market: Growth Effects of EU Integration*, Policy Brief 02, 2014.

6 Public Opinion Research Unit, University of Macedonia 2014, Scientific Expert: Giannis Konstantinides. For further information please refer to the survey carried out for Dianeosis-think tank: Scientific Expert: Ilias Nikolaidis in March 2016

employed by a number of experts involved in designing the voting advice application EU Vox in April 2014, which revealed that a broad variety of parties share some similar views regarding core principles of the EU integration project. For instance, the European Common Foreign and Security Policy is considered to be an institutional framework that might limit the capacity of Greece to act independently.⁷

The Impact of The Refugee Crisis on Greece's Relations with Other EU-Countries

Greek society's increasing aversion towards the European Union has manifested in many ways. The first was a pathological anti-Germanism fuelled by the bitter memories of the Greek population from the Nazi occupation during World War II. The second has been many Greeks' discontent with the lack of a coherent EU response, and with many EU-countries for their insufficient solidarity with the country's handling of the tremendous migratory flood into Europe, as Greece is considered a 'front state in the defence of Europe' by those concerned about migration. Moreover, Greece has been the main door so far for record numbers of undocumented immigrants and asylum seekers coming to Europe.⁸ Therefore, Athens has long pushed for more solidarity and a coherent EU response to the refugees and irregular immigrants from the Middle East, North Africa, sub-Saharan Africa, and Asia.

Meanwhile, Greece has been the main point of application for the Dublin II EU-Regulation of 2003, which created an obligation for the country of first arrival to the EU to not allow illegal immigrants to travel to other EU countries. More specifically, this means that Greece has had to implement a policy in line with international obligations and the European

on Greek citizens' attitude toward the European Union and the merits and profits Greece has had from its participation in the European Union.

7 EUVox Voting Advice Application, <http://www.euvox2014.eu/?page_id=363>, (Date Accessed: 20 April 2016).

8 European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders of the Member States of the European Union (FRONTEX), *Annual Risk Analysis 2015*, p. 20

Charter of Fundamental Rights, despite its enormous economic problems and limited financial resources. Under these regulations, it has to provide migrants with adequate services and safeguards and prevent them from traveling to other European countries. It is no surprise that the Greek government demanded that the EU-Commission allocate the respective portfolio to the Greek commissioner.⁹

Furthermore, after six consecutive years of crisis that has torn society and exhausted state capacity and human resources¹⁰, Greece has recently been confronted with the daunting challenge of managing the huge irregular migration flows into Europe as a result of the Syrian War and providing protection to people in need. The response to this crisis has been considered to be poor, which has led to the professionalism of the government's radical left party (SYRIZA) as well as EU-capacity in crisis-handling coming under fire. Although the role of the EU in handling the problem is quite complicated¹¹, many have blamed other EU-countries for not implementing their commitments in reallocating migrants from their points of en-

9 EU-Council Regulation (EC) No 343/2003 of 18 February 2003 Establishing the Criteria and Mechanisms for Determining the Member State Responsible for Examining an Asylum Application Lodged in One of the Member States by a Third-Country National.

10 The debt crisis in Greece has already resulted in drastic cuts in defence spending and salaries for army personnel. Greek military spending has dropped by 46 per cent since 2010. Andreas Stergiou, Christos Kollias and Suzanna-Maria Paleologou, "Military expenditure in Greece: Security Challenges and Economic Constraints", *The Economics of Peace and Security Journal*, Vol. 11, No. 1, 2016, pp. 28-34. Military expenditure and arms imports have worsened Greek sovereign debt. However it is meanwhile scientifically investigated that since 1981, when Greece joined the EU, the strong EU members have been watching Greece's excessive military spending without any worries as they had huge benefits from arms exports. This is particularly the case for Germany and France, which even after the start of the debt crisis refused to cancel arms deals with Greece. Eftychia Nikolaidou, "The Role of Military Expenditure and Arms Imports in the Greek Debt Crisis", *The Economics of Peace and Security Journal*, Vol. 11, No. 1, 2016, pp. 18-27.

11 For further information regarding the constraints and the shortcomings of the problem, please refer to: "The EU-Integrated Situation Awareness and Analysis Situation Report", No. 15, produced by the European Commission and the European External Action Service, 1 March 2016.

trance (namely Greece and Italy) to other parts of the continent. In September 2015, EU-states agreed to take 66,400 Asylum-seekers from Greece; however, the relocation process to other EU countries has progressed very slow (the monthly target of 6,000 relocations was never met), while about 49,000 refugees and migrants were registered 'as trapped' in Greece in June 2016.¹²

Meanwhile, thousands of refugees have fled the traumatic experiences of war to find themselves living in terrible conditions in Greece. They are sleeping in the squares of central Athens, or anywhere they can find a temporary shelter. Inside the so-called 'hot spot' camps created for refugees, the situation has become explosive, as the refugees do not want to stay in these rather inadequately equipped establishments, but instead wish to continue their journey to Germany or Scandinavia.¹³

In order to respond to this acute humanitarian crisis, the EU announced a groundbreaking decision in March 2016¹⁴ to grant humanitarian funding to an EU-country, i.e. Greece, for first time in its history. Specifically, the European Commission is going to provide 700 million Euros in emergency humanitarian funding for Greece until 2018 to help it deal with the massive refugee crisis. The funding is planned to be allocated to aid organizations that will work with the Greek government to provide assistance such as food, shelter, and medical and educational services for refugees,¹⁵

12 "Amnesty Report on the Refugees Detained in Greece", 23 April 2016 and "EC Prods Greece to Enforce Dublin Regulation", Kathimerini News, 15 June 2016, <<http://www.ekathimerini.com/209647/article/ekathimerini/news/ec-prods-greece-to-enforce-dublin-regulation>>, (Date Accessed: 16 June 2016).

13 As Amnesty International notes in its reports, people detained some in camps have virtually no access to legal aid, limited access to services and support, and hardly any information about their current status or possible fate. The fear and desperation are palpable. "Amnesty International Report on the Refugees Detained in Greece", 7 April 2016

14 EU Council Regulation 2016/369 of 15 March 2016 on the Provision of Emergency Support within the Union, *Official Journal of the European Union*, L 70/1, 16 March 2016

15 The first approved 83 million euros in financial assistance to Greece were allocated in April 2016 to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR),

as well as providing funding to the Greek government itself. Apparently the EU-countries are approaching the problem as a humanitarian one to be addressed by humanitarian organisations and not as a security issue. However, this act of solidarity does not go far enough for Greece. Athens has repeatedly demanded an equitable sharing of the burden between EU countries. On the other hand, more people have begun advocating shutting out migrants by reinforcing the EU's external border and persuading third countries to prevent people from crossing into the EU.

Additionally, Greek people have begun to question whether Greek national borders are primarily European Union borders as it is stipulated in the EU-treaties, while Europeans have begun questioning whether Greece is willing or able to guard the EU's borders. The latter have also accused Greece of not adequately improving its asylum service and judicial system so that each case can be examined individually and appeals can be heard before people are returned to their home countries.¹⁶ This situation has proven contradictory due to the growing fear of terrorism and a surge of nationalism and populism that has shaken the European Union's foundations, though there is not enough evidence that terrorism is directly connected to the influx of migration.

A double standard has arisen in the humanitarian attitude among the European countries and a large extent of the Greek population. They are ready to help refugees as long as they stay away from their (European) homes. For example, they have not been adept enough in facilitating regular refugee channels to Europe, which would actually be the only way to

the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and six international nongovernmental organizations, including Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF).

16 Greece has repeatedly been accused by many European politicians, mainly Austrian and East-European, of not doing enough to secure its borders. Robert Fico, Slovakia's Prime Minister, said several times by the end of 2015 and the beginning of 2016, it was high time to expel Greece from the Schengen agreement allowing for free movement among countries. He added that other governments thought the same.

take control of the mobility market from the ruthless recruiters, smugglers, employers, and landlords who exploit migrants at present.¹⁷

In most EU countries, immigration rapidly became one of the most polarizing policy issues, revitalising the discussion about a possible fortification of the EU as many countries shifted into a restrictive policy. In fact, the old concept of 'fortress Europe' has come into the discussion on several occasions. However, this term has traditionally focused on non-EU-countries, mainly revolving around strengthening the EU's external borders against migrants from other part of the world, particularly since participation in the Schengen system of passport-free travel entails a state giving up physical control over who crosses its border. However, the term began to be redefined in 2015. As many thousands of migrants had already managed to approach the coast of EU-countries, especially Italy and Greece, the term 'fortification' started to be interpreted more laxly, namely that the 'fortress' should be relocated deeper into EU territory, making it more easily guarded. For instance, authorities in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) returned refugees and migrants to Greece through holes in the fences! This has notably resulted in unprecedented situations where the Greek state is the only one in charge.

But even in Greece itself, the tremendous refugee inflows have disillusioned the society. An emotionally charged historical legacy and a mistrust towards the – until recently – acclaimed Erdogan administration have contributed to the establishment of conspiracy theories of the existence of a secret Erdogan-led plan of Islamising Europe, especially regarding the former EU-Turkey and Greece-Turkey agreements on relocation of immigrants that have never been implemented.¹⁸ A number of other factors regarding their eastern neighbour still gives Greece a real scare - Turkey's

17 On this topic for a comprehensive analysis, please refer to: Collett Elizabeth, Paul Clewett and Susan Fratzke, *No Way Out? Making Additional Migration Channels Work for Refugees*, (Brussels: Migration Policy Institute Europe, 2016).

18 European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders of the Member States of the European Union (FRONTEX), *Annual Risk Analysis 2012*, p. 13

outlook for 2016 does not appear as excellent as previous years, the Turkish economy is slowing down, the Erdogan administration is being panned by many sides, and a spiralling conflict with the outlawed PKK bedevils the country's southern region.

Turkey still possesses the second largest standing army in NATO, with an absolute dominance of conventional military forces vis-a-vis other countries in the region. Although Turkey is struggling in terms of its foreign policy capabilities for a variety of reasons, this does not detract from Ankara's geostrategic value. As a matter of fact, any internal crisis within Turkey, or any external crisis around Turkey, could culminate in a state of affairs to the detriment of Greece's fragile internal coherence. However, the refugee- and migration-problem could become a catalyst for unique developments in the Greek-Turkish relationship overshadowing their traditional animosity

Greek-Turkish Relations in an Era of Crisis and the Implications of the Refugee Problem

The history of Greek-Turkish relations has been a very long and complicated one. After exhausting negotiations, Greece and Turkey were included into NATO in February 1952. However, while other NATO members focused on pursuing a strong commitment to collective defence during the Cold War era, Greece and Turkey soon became caught up in a series of divisive regional disputes. Every Greek government since 1955 has seen Turkey as its primary security threat and the Kurds as natural allies, while Turkey has systematically striven to impose its revisionist agenda in the Aegean Sea, Cyprus, and Thrace. The second half of the 1990s precipitated a sharp deterioration in this relationship, followed by a remarkable improvement. Greek-Turkish relations have thrived on the level of the economy and civil society. Trade between both countries has increased remarkably over the last few years, and significant economic cooperation emerged in the banking and tourism sectors.¹⁹ During 2016, Turkey be-

19 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey, Relations between Turkey and Greece, <<http://www.mfa.gov.tr/relations-between-turkey-and>

came Greece's third largest export partner after Germany and Italy, with a trade volume of 1,26 Billion Euro (6,6% of the total Greek Exports).²⁰ Moreover, contacts within academia, business, and NGOs have multiplied in quantity as well as quality.

However, not all aspects of the relationship have been so positive. There has been no fundamental progress toward a comprehensive Greek-Turkish settlement covering the long-standing bilateral disputes over the delineation of territorial waters, continental shelf, Flight Information Region, and even the sovereignty of some islets. Perhaps more importantly, no issue has been more illustrative of the Greek-Turkish bilateral problems, nor has any issue been more politicised and securitized, than the Cyprus question. The Mediterranean island has been split since 1974, while the self-declared Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus on the northern part of the island is only recognised by the Republic of Turkey. Though the entire island is now considered to be a member of the European Union, the *acquis communautaire* has been suspended in northern Cyprus according to the Protocol No. 10 of the Accession Treaty until a political settlement to the Cyprus problem is achieved. The situation in Cyprus has proven to be one of the most intractable conflicts in the history of the United Nations (alongside the Israeli-Palestinian conflict), and the lack of a political solution has hindered Ankara's EU membership bid.²¹

In May 2015, negotiations for a settlement of the Cyprus problem resumed, following the election of Mustafa Akinci – a moderate leftist known for his cooperation with the Greek side during his term of office as mayor of Nicosia in the 1990s – as president of the break-away regime in

greece.en.mfa>, (Date Accessed: 26 February 2016 and Timeseries, *Hellenic Statistical Authority*, cumulative 2000-2015, <[20 “Greece in Figures January-March 2016 Exports – Dispatches 2015”, *Hellenic Statistical Authority*, <\[21 Evanthis Hatzivasileiou, “The Cyprus Question”, in Giannis Valinakis \\(Ed.\\), *Greek Foreign and European Policy 1990-2010*, in Greek, \\(Athens: Sideris Publisher, 2010\\), pp. 84-86.\]\(http://www.statistics.gr/el/greece-in-figures>, \(Date Accessed: 25 April 2016\).</p></div><div data-bbox=\)](http://www.statistics.gr/el/statistics/-/publication/SFC02/->, (Date Accessed: 27 February 2016).</p></div><div data-bbox=)

April 2015. At the same time, the foreign media and several analysts began to create a climate of euphoria, energizing the momentum of the new talks, predicting a positive outcome of the restarted talks this time around. Nevertheless, the widespread optimism thus far appears to be rather wishful thinking, as thorny issues on property²², territorial adjustments, demographic composition, security arrangements, and power-sharing still seem to be irreconcilable, even though there are estimations that a settlement could add almost 3 percentage points to the country's annual growth rate over the next 20 years.²³

Moreover, a necessary sense of togetherness is absent in the two communities, and it is unlikely that the people living there are ready to co-exist, regardless of the outcome of negotiations. Apart from that, there are considerable doubts about the consensus within the SYRIZA-ANEL-government on the issue that became evident in the course of recent negotiations. During his official visit to Cyprus in 2015, Greek Premier Alexis Tsipras added to his schedule a meeting with members of the Turkish Cypriot community in order to demonstrate his support for the UN-brokered negotiations; in contrast, the coalition government's junior partner Panos Kammenos appeared much less forthcoming, if not completely opposed, to the ongoing negotiation process.

The rise of SYRIZA, a radical left-wing political party, to power in January 2015 added a new, imponderable piece to the Eastern Mediterranean geopolitical architecture. In forming a coalition government, SYRIZA chose the far-right populist Independent Greeks Party (ANEL) as its governing partner, and appointed of its leader, fierce nationalist Panos

22 The property issue is one of the biggest hurdles, as a possible compensation for the 160,000 Greek and 40,000 Turkish Cypriots forced to abandon their homes in 1974 will cost billions of euros. The economic situation in the North is bad, while the South cannot take on much more debt because it is still recovering from a banking crisis and a nearly 10 billion euro bail-out. It must be granted that the international community will not offer the kind of money required for these compensations.

23 Fiona Mullen, *The Cyprus Peace Dividend Revisited: A Productivity and Sectoral Approach*, PRIO Cyprus Centre Report, (Nicosia: PRIO Cyprus Centre, 2014).

Kammenos, as Minister of Defence. This decision raised strong concerns about the possible impact on Greek defence and security policy. Kammenos owes his popularity to his conspiracy theories with which he repeatedly astonished the public. However, these changes have not had as great of an impact as expected. Though changes in the Greek political scene are mostly followed by radical changes in the foreign policy too, the leftist foreign policy course stands in uninterrupted continuity from its previous governments.

Therefore, Greece's foreign policy attitude toward Turkey has continuously revolved around the motto of "the enemy of my enemy is my friend". Greek-Israeli relations are a typical example of this. As it is widely known, the relationship between Israel and Turkey has entered into a period of great tension due to a series of diplomatic episodes and confrontations between 2008 and 2012 following 50 years of close and successful cooperation covering energy security, establishment of a regional missile defence system, military exchanges and defence deals, cooperation against Islamic radicalism, etc.²⁴ Turkey had been the first majority Muslim nation in the world to recognise Israel *de jure* and to sign a commercial agreement with Israel in 1950, and remained the only such country to have done so for three decades. Turkey was also an integral part of Israel's 'peripheral policy', aimed at breaking its isolation from the Arab states. Furthermore, Turkish territory was the place where Israel maintained one of its most active intelligence missions.²⁵

After Turkish-Israeli ties became strained, Israel, Cyprus and, by extension, Greece, came together to form a defence-economic alliance, thereby undermining vital Turkish interests and ambitions of regional hegemony.

24 Çevik Bir and Martin Sherman, "Formula for Stability: Turkey Plus Israel", *Middle East Quarterly*, Vol. 5, No 4, Fall 2002, pp. 23-32 and Ekavi Athanasopoulou, "Responding to a Challenge: Greece's New Policy towards Israel", *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 1, 2003, pp. 108-125.

25 Theodoros Tsakiris, "Shifting Sands or Burning Bridges? The Evolution of Turkish-Israeli Relations after the Mavi Marmara Incident and the Strategic Energy Calculations of Greece & Cyprus", *ELIAMEP Policy Paper*, No. 22, 2014, p. 23.

After Turkey had suspended all joint exercises with Israel, Greece offered to step in, thereby replacing Turkey as Israel's strategic defence partner. This unprecedented political, military, and energy relationship also materialized as a result of the economic benefit expected from substantial natural gas and oil resources discovered in the adjacent Israel and Cyprus exclusive economic zones. Indeed, energy has been a catalyst for improving bilateral relations between Israel and Greece, as the latter has been seeking to upgrade its energy profile both in the short term as a transit state for gas coming from Israel and Cyprus to the European market, and in the long term as an energy producer state. The upgrading of bilateral military cooperation should be regarded against this backdrop, as it could ensure stability and preserve peace, thus maintaining the flow of raw energy material (oil and gas).²⁶ That energy collaboration predictably attracted EU interest given the enormous European demand for the relatively cleaner power of natural gas, as it would allow EU countries to both diversify and secure their gas supply from abroad.²⁷ Furthermore, this would also coincide with Washington's long-pursued aim of putting an end to Moscow's tactic of using its natural gas exports to exercise economic and political influence in Europe.²⁸ Thus, Washington's support for the recently formed three-party alliance has not solely been the result of Jewish lobbying.

Moreover, Athens needs an ally that can provide it with strong technical and strategic support, while Israel needs Greece because it lacks strategic depth and, in part, maritime experience after the termination of the Jerusalem–Ankara agreements. Furthermore, from an Israeli perspective, the strengthening of ties with Greece and Cyprus constitutes a win-win situa-

26 Allison Good, "East Mediterranean Natural Gas and Israel's Regional Foreign Policy", *IMES Capstone Paper Series*, The Elliott School of International Affairs, George Washington University, Institute for Middle East Studies, May 2014, pp. 35–36.

27 Sami Andoura and Clémentine d'Oultremont, "The Role of Gas in the External Dimension of the EU Energy Transition", *Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute Policy Paper*, No. 79, March 2013.

28 Ariel Cohen and Kevin DeCorla-Souza, "Eurasian Energy and Israeli Choices", The Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, *Mideast Security and Policy Studies*, No. 88, March 2011, pp. 32–34.

tion, as it stands as a counterweight to Turkish ambitions. Stronger Israeli relations with Greece and Cyprus may also serve to encourage Turkey to show more flexibility in negotiations regarding the normalization of ties between Ankara and Jerusalem. Surprisingly, it was the left-leaning Greek government that decided to further deepen military ties with Israel (common high-level military drills, exchange of military know-how, etc.) so that a deal could be reached in July 2015, allowing Israel to use military facilities in Greece. So far, the United States has been the only country with which Israel has ever signed a similar accord. Paradoxically, it is the leftist government that appears to have expanded the limited security and military cooperation with Jerusalem that previous Greek socialist and conservative governments had opted for in order to avoid challenging Turkey.²⁹

However, the EU-Cyprus-Greece-Israel cooperation conflicts with Turkey's geopolitical aspirations in the region. Turkish economic and political elites would perceive a possible export route to European markets through the Mediterranean, connecting Israel, Cyprus and Greece, as a threat to their own ambitions to transform Turkey into the major non-Russian transit route for gas sales and a regional energy hub.³⁰ Ankara has been contesting the fact that the areas with gas reserves in the eastern basin of the Mediterranean are situated in clearly divided national waters, stretching from the Levant coast to southern Crete and perhaps beyond.³¹ Furthermore, it has repeatedly threatened Cyprus with military action and created tensions in the region by dispatching Turkish military vessels, even while the US-company Noble Energy was still carrying out exploratory drilling off the island's southern coast.

29 Andreas Stergiou, "Greek-Israeli Defense and Energy Ties: Writing a New Chapter in Bilateral Relations", *Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 9, No. 3, 2015, pp. 417-428.

30 Muharrem Eksi, "The role of Energy in Turkish Foreign Policy", *The Turkish Yearbook of International Relations*, Vol. 41, 2010, pp. 62-65.

31 Yüksel Inan and Mine Pınar Gözen, "Turkey's Maritime Boundary Relations", in Mustafa Kibaroglu (Ed.), *Eastern Mediterranean Countries and Issues*, (Ankara: Foreign Policy Institute, 2009), pp. 153-211.

Meanwhile, the energy cooperation is viewed skeptically by energy experts. Israel is uncertain how much gas it will eventually have, whether it will be able to export it, to whom, or by what means. Talks with Greece and Cyprus about gas have been going on for several years without any real results.³² It is conceivable in principle to build a pipeline connecting the three countries, but it would be very complicated from a technical standpoint, and would cost almost ten billion dollars.³³ Publicly, the three countries have repeatedly announced that they are mulling over constructing shared infrastructure for gas export, while in fact Cyprus and Israel are competing to export gas to other countries. Furthermore, Israel can prevent Cyprus from exporting its Aphrodite gas to Egypt, and Cyprus can prevent Israel from exporting its Leviathan stock to Turkey.

The Aphrodite reservoir, discovered in Bloc 12 in Cypriot waters, partly extends into Israeli territorial waters.³⁴ This has complicated Israel and Cyprus's joint development of the reservoir by delaying the signing of a unitization agreement. Since 2010, the two parties have been disputing the quantity of gas in Israeli territory and Israel's level of involvement in the reservoir's development. Meanwhile, Israel refuses to sign a unitization agreement between the states to formally delineate the developments of natural gas and oil reserves shared by the pair, which delays the development of the reservoir.³⁵

For its part, Cyprus will not approve a gas pipeline from Israel to Turkey, which would cross its territorial waters. In light of this dispute, a US-

32 The Aphrodite reservoir, discovered in Bloc 12 in Cypriot territorial waters, partly extends into Israeli territorial waters. This has complicated Israel-Cyprus' joint development of the reservoir by delaying the signing of a unitization agreement. The two parties have been disputing since 2010 over the quantity of gas in Israeli territory and Israel's level of involvement in the reservoir's development.

33 Arye Mekel, "A New Geopolitical Bloc is Born in the Eastern Mediterranean: Israel, Greece and Cyprus", *BESA Center Perspectives Paper*, No. 329, February 2016.

34 Hedy Cohen, "Cypriot President to Visit Israel for Gas Talks", *Globes Israel Business Arena*, 10 November 2015.

35 Hedy Cohen, "Israel, Greece, Cyprus Mull Joint Natural Gas Projects", *Globes Israel Business Arena*, 20 April 2016.

led attempt at mediation appears to be motivated by the desire to facilitate the pro-Western monetization of Mediterranean gas by constructing such a pipeline. That option, however, presupposes a settlement of the Cyprus conflict, or at least an improvement of bilateral relations, as the pipeline would pass through the internationally recognised Exclusive Economic Zone of the Republic Cyprus, which is at the moment controlled by the breakaway regime. However, such a unilateral move by Tel Aviv could complicate things further, as it would amount to recognition of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, which would torpedo Israel-Cyprus relations for good.

Greece's ties with Egypt also developed along the lines of the same philosophy, "the enemy of my enemy is my friend." Following the July 2013 military coup against the Morsi government and the rise of General Abdel Fattah el-Sisi to power, diplomatic relations between Turkey and Egypt rapidly deteriorated, paving the way for the delineation of Economic Exclusive Zones in the Eastern Mediterranean between Egypt and Greece, which Athens had unsuccessfully envisaged for years. The left-oriented government continued on the policy path, initiated by its predecessor, of promoting the organisation of a series of trilateral summits between the leaders of Cyprus, Egypt and Greece. These attempts at cooperation were boosted by the discovery of the largest gas field in the Mediterranean on the Egyptian shore in August 2015. It also proceeded to initiate joint Egyptian-Greek air force exercises (Meidoza 2015). Yet it remained questionable whether the three states would go so far as to delineate their EEZ in the absence of, or despite the strong objections of, Turkey.³⁶

The Recent Geopolitical Shifts in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Implications for the Greek-Turkish Relationship

In October 2014, Ankara issued a NAVTEX order reserving areas in the Economic Exclusive Zone of the Republic Cyprus for seismic surveys, and

36 Ioannis Grigoriadis, "The Foreign Policy of Greece's Syriza-Anel Coalition Government: an Early Appraisal", *Barcelona Center for International Affairs Notes Internacionales*, Vol. 119, May 2015, p. 3.

dispatched a seismic vessel accompanied by Turkish warships in order to collect data; in reprisal, Greek Cypriots and Israelis asked the Russians to participate in a joint naval exercise in the waters of the Eastern Mediterranean on the very same days. It was the first episode in the gradual deterioration of Ankara-Moscow relations (Moscow threatened Turkey with counteraction, should it continue its naval activity there) that was to culminate in the context of the Syrian crisis.

In the Syrian context, NATO initially condemned Russian involvement, warning Moscow to stop supporting Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. However, after the terrorist attacks in Paris and the invocation of Article 42.7 of the NATO charter by France, a rapprochement between Western countries and Russia toward ISIS began to emerge. In spite of this fragile accord, a Russian Sukhoi Su-24 aircraft was suddenly shot down by a Turkish Air Force F-16 fighter jet in an incident thought to be the first time a NATO country shot down a Russian plane in half a century.

The incident triggered, as it is well known, a confrontation between Russia and Turkey, negatively affecting any possible NATO-Russia cooperation. Clouds had appeared already over Turkish-Russian relations during the 2014 Russian invasion on the Crimean Peninsula, where roughly 300,000 Turkic-speaking Tatars still remain as a remnant of Ottoman history. The ensuing annexation of Crimea shifted the balance of power in the Black Sea at Turkey's expense. Russia's Black Sea Fleet, largely designed to counter Turkey's naval strength in war time, can now be deployed at whim in the Black Sea after the annexation of Sevastopol. In response to these and other regional developments, Turkey has been calling on its NATO allies for greater support. In particular, Turkey has already demanded backing from its NATO allies towards Syria. After Syrian troops shot down a Turkish warplane in the summer of 2012, it called for a convention of NATO members under Article 4 of the organisation's charter, which provides for consultations when a member state feels its territorial integrity, political independence, or security is under threat.³⁷

37 Andreas Stergiou, "Geopolitics: Greece, Cyprus and Israel Change the Military Balance in the Mediterranean", *Geopolitical Information Service-GIS*, December 2013.

By shooting down the Russian airplane, Turkey signaled that it wanted action to be taken in Syria only under its supervision, allowing Ankara to dictate the terms of to put its terms on the post-war architecture of power in the region. Over the past few decades, Turkey's focus has been on northern Syria and northern Iraq, a belt of former Ottoman provinces that naturally extend eastward from Turkey's Hatay province and are mostly populated by Kurds. Russia's involvement in Syria in defence of the Alawite government runs directly counter to Turkey's objective of expanding its own military footprint in Aleppo in order to keep Kurdish separatist activity under control, probably by creating a 'free stateless zone', and eventually replacing Syrian President Bashar al Assad with a Sunni government friendly to Turkish interests. Yet this does not seem to comply at all with Western interests - a first since Turkey was incorporated into the North Atlantic alliance - since Western countries have been heavily relying on Kurds and seeking Russian assistance in resolving the Syrian question.³⁸

However, Turkey and the EU share a very serious common problem linked to the Syrian war - the huge wave of refugees. Following the military successes of Assad's forces backed by the Russian Federation in northern Syria in the first months of 2016, the number of refugees on the Turkish border increased, threatening another wave of migration from the Middle East to the EU.³⁹

Furthermore, several developments in Europe since the summer of 2015 seem to have contributed to the ballooning of the migrant and refugee flows into Europe, namely German Chancellor Angela Merkel's welcoming attitude toward the refugees and a more or less refugee- and migrant-friendly policy followed by the radical left-led Greek government. On the other hand, other European Union leaders have been desperate to stop the flow of people and pushed through, as is widely known, an EU-Turkey deal and a NATO-led Greek-Turkish anti-smuggling operation in the Aegean.

38 Krzysztof Strachota and Mateusz Chudziak, "Turkey and the EU: the Play for a Security Zone in Syria", *Centre for Eastern Studies Analyses*, 10 February 2016.

39 Krzysztof Strachota and Mateusz Chudziak, "Turkey and the EU: the play for a security zone in Syria".

According to the EU-Turkey agreements, Turkey assented to cooperate in restricting the uncontrolled flow of refugees to the EU via its territory in exchange for financial aid (over 3 billion euros), the enhancement of political co-operation (including unfreezing accession negotiations and visa liberalisation for Turkish citizens), and a program of controlled resettlement of refugees from Turkey to the EU. Within this framework, an extra 4,000 staff (case workers, interpreters, judges, return officers, and security officers) are planned to be stationed on the Greek islands to manage the flow.⁴⁰ Thus far, Greece has hardly managed to sustain an effective asylum system. Established in 2013, the new Asylum Service has had to rely on voluntary work and assistance by UNHCR to cover its needs for interpreters. Greece has also been unable to run adequate shelters for migrant children, as a result of which many are left to survive in destitution and homelessness.⁴¹

Nonetheless, both of the deals aimed at stemming the inflow of immigrants and refugees into Europe and deepening the EU-Turkey relationship are haunted by an array of difficulties and inconsistencies. In the first place, the EU-Turkey deal has been savaged by human rights organisations. They have criticized the deal because Turkey is not considered to be a safe country, and because the deal would undermine the effective exercise of asylum seeker's rights through a fast-track procedure to examine international protection claims within 15 days, including appeal.⁴² Only a few months earlier, the idea of returning all newly arrived asylum seekers from the Greek islands to Turkey would have been met with strong opposition in several EU capitals, but now it has been turned into a mainstream

40 EU-Council Press Release 144/16, "EU-Turkey statement on the International Summit", 18 March 2016.

41 Danai Angeli, Anna Triandafyllidou and Angeliki Dimitriadi, "Assessing the Cost-Effectiveness of Irregular Migration Control Policies in Greece", *Hellenic Foundation of European and Foreign Policy-Midas Policy Paper*, October 2014, pp. 2-3.

42 "Greece: Asylum Seekers Locked Up", *Human Right Watch Report*, 14 April 2016; "EU/Greece: First Turkey Deportations Riddled With Abuse", *Human Right Watch Report*, 19 April 2016.

view.⁴³ Paradoxically, Turkey is being promised easier entry to the Schengen area – though very few people believe that this promise would ever be upheld - while Greece is threatened at the same time with eviction from it by countries that have repeatedly rejected or refused to implement European Union decisions to relocate refugees across the union!

Furthermore, joint NATO-naval operations are planned to be implemented by the SYRIZA-led government that believes NATO should have already ceased to exist⁴⁴ and by an anti-Turkish Defence minister. Nevertheless, Athens agreed to the terms of NATO patrols in the Aegean on 25 February 2016, which contradicts seemingly timeless territorial sensitivities of the Greek State. In fact, the agreement stipulated that the two countries would not operate in each other's territorial waters and air space, but there is always the danger that a ship's patrol could set a precedent for claims over disputed territorial waters. Of great concern for Athens is that the repeated violations of Greek airspace by Turkish military jets could legitimise Turkish claims on the Aegean, even despite NATO presence in March and April 2016.

While Athens is not particularly happy with the concessions the EU is ready to grant to Turkey, it is probably more eager for the EU-Turkey agreements to work out than Turkey itself. Struggling to avoid a total default, Greece cannot afford any military confrontation, and it is surely not in a position to dictate the rules of the game, i.e. to renegotiate the EU-NATO agreements with Turkey, while still in negotiations with its EU and IMF partners on the next bail-out and a possible debt restructuring/reprofiling. Greek authorities also hope that the European Central Bank might allow Greek banks to participate in its regular refinancing operations upon the successful end of the negotiations, from which they have been barred for more than a year.

43 Petra Bendel, "Refugee Policy in the European Union: Protect Human Rights!", *Friedrich Ebert Stiftung WISO Discurs*, March 2016, pp.17-18.

44 Single Party members' and official Party's statements in recent years have been clearly directed against the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation - which according to the party rhetoric has no reason to exist - as well as against foreign military bases in Greece and allowing the US to remain in the country.

Given that the Greek state is located at the EU's most sensitive external border and its Balkan neighbours decided to entirely close their borders to refugees and migrants, Greece was burdened with thousands of stranded refugees and left with no choice but to fully cooperate with Ankara. However, this is a strategy that might force Athens to fully support Turkey's demands in Syria, should the agreement be translated into a drastic reduction of the inflow of people, thereby opposing its enemies. This would actually reverse the old "the enemy of my enemy is my friend" policy followed so far towards Ankara for first time since the early fifties into a rather new policy – "the enemy of my enemy is also my enemy." 🌐

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