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GREEK-TURKISH RELATIONS

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Turkish-Greek relations have undergone a profound change since 1999. But this change is more conceptual than substantial, as the two parties which viewed one another with hostility and rivalry decided to change the course of their relation. Indeed, they sought to work together in averting possible sources of conflict and to develop confidence between them.

The reversal of the Greek position with respect to Turkey's accession process to the European Union (EU) was the most important and significant sign of policy change that led to a thaw in their bilateral relations. In the past, several EU countries had the comfort of attributing any negative development to Turkey's accession, to Greek intransigency and could thus hide their own responsibility. However, once Greece declared its favourable policy towards Turkey's accession, the true colors of the others became evident. The *real politiks* of the Simitis government are now pursued by others.

Another major change came when Greece distanced itself and in fact repudiated the PKK (Kurdistan's Workers Party) terrorism in Turkey. The fact that the leader of the terrorist organisation had found refuge in Greece was an embarrassing discovery. From 1999 onwards, many important steps were taken to avert possible crises or conflict between the two countries and mechanisms were activated to address core issues too.

Since 1999, the two countries signed 33 agreements-protocols-memorandum of understanding on various subjects and built an impressive framework. The adoption of 24 confidence building measures (CBM) stands as a concrete contribution to the efforts to enhance mutual understanding between Turkey and Greece. The 40th round of exploratory talks were held in Athens in July 2008.

The high level visits that take place between the civilian and military authorities add an important momentum to the process. Greek Prime Minister Karamanlis paid an official visit to Turkey in January 2008. This was the first visit from Greece or Turkey at that level since 1959. Military and civilian search and rescue exercises have been held regularly since 2006.

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Some core issues remain unresolved, being the most important issue the delimitation of territorial waters, and the most insurmountable one the Cyprus issue

The success of the dialogue process in the economic field is outstanding. The bilateral trade volume has reached 2.3 billion Euros and the total Greek investments in Turkey amounts approximately 4.3 billion Euros. The number of Greek companies operating in Turkey has are about 300 and the Turkish Ziraat Bank received permission to open branches in Athens and Komotini. Turkish investment in Greece however remains marginal.

Joint investments in third countries are underway. Enka and Ate took a joint project in Oman. The project is worth around 2 billion dollars. Last year more than 400.000 Greek tourists visited Turkey while 160.000 Turks went to Greece. The Schengen visa remains the main constraint for Turkish tourists. On the other hand, energy constitutes an important aspect of our relations. The inauguration of a natural gas pipeline in November 2007 was a major step forward and Italy also joined this project.

Despite this positive state of affairs between Turkey and Greece, some core issues remain unresolved. Perhaps the most important issue is the delimitation of territorial waters between the two countries. While Turkey insists on a 3 miles limit, Greece wishes to expand the breadth of the territorial waters to 12 miles and beyond. The specific nature of the Aegean Sea and the existence of Greek islands very close to its shores lead Turkey to consider any unilateral extension as *causus belli*. Although war, given the current positive political climate and deepened economic ties and interests has become an obsolete notion, there is however a need to resolve this critical issue which is a source of constant tension. Delimitation of territorial waters could also help solving other problematic issues such as continental shelf and airspace rights. I believe that the best way to resolve the territorial waters issue is to apply varied geometry instead of sticking to a fixed menu. This method would allow the application of 3 to 12 miles in different parts of the Aegean Sea.

Exploratory talks between the two countries to find mutually acceptable solutions to some contested issues have yet to produce tangible results. The process has been too slow. My personal recommendation would be to speed up these talks and not wait for a crisis.

The key question for the two countries and the most insurmountable one is the Cyprus issue. Despite its membership in the EU, Cyprus is still divided and will probably remain divided until a comprehensive political settlement is found. As it affects regional balance and the very essence of Turkish-Greek relations, like Turkey, Greece also has a political and moral responsibility to contribute to a political solution.

Unlike its predecessors, the Erdogan government in Turkey made a dramatic turn on Cyprus' policy towards Turkey. The classical school of thought considered that the Cyprus issue was resolved through the Turkish intervention of 1974; both communities had established their own states and lived peacefully in their respective territories. Therefore there was no compelling reason for a political settlement. To his credit, Mr. Erdogan changed this policy and became a strong advocate of a comprehensive political settlement. Despite a strong opposition from other political parties and civil-military bureaucracy, he accepted the Annan plan and encouraged the Turkish Cypriots to do the same. On the

other hand, it must be stated that the Annan plan was not an original set of ideas but the distillation of long years of negotiations held under the auspices of the United Nations. It was wrong to expect that such a plan could satisfy all expectations of the parties. Both sides were right to criticize the plan but they had to see the bigger picture. Turkey and the Turkish Cypriots accepted the Annan plan whereas the Greek Cypriots rejected it. This rejection, while criticized by the EU, nevertheless did not prevent them from accepting Cyprus as a member. Cyprus was the only candidate that entered the EU without resolving its political problems.

There are reasons for cynicism in viewing the current negotiations between Mr. Talat and Mr. Hristofyas. Many initiatives have failed to stop the deepening divisions of Cyprus. Peace plans have come and gone, burning the fingers of many UN secretaries general.

One key reason that nothing moved for so long, was the sense of uniqueness in local bitterness. But this state of affairs has changed. Both Hristofyas and Talat understand the need for a political settlement. They agreed on some basic parameters. They defined the overall goal of the negotiations which indicated a compromise. The Greek Cypriots accepted that there would be two constituent states and the Turkish Cypriots accepted that the new federal state would have a single international personality. They accepted, in principle, that there would be one citizenship and sovereignty.

The negotiations in Cyprus between the two parties offer a chance for the settlement of the Cyprus issue which was missed in 2004. A successful conclusion of these talks would be a chance to set Turkey's EU convergence process back on track.

If this process in Cyprus breaks down, it will likely be the last attempt at a comprehensive settlement for many years. A two-state solution on the island may gather consensus. The old comfort of an unthreatening status quo is no longer available. Now that the Greek Cypriots are full members of the EU, the stakes and risks are higher. Failure could lead to new insecurities and even military tensions between Cyprus and Turkey with serious implications for Turkish-Greek relations as well.

Inertia in these talks would be a great mistake and risk. The EU has not yet realized the risks it faces in Cyprus. On the island, cynicism is widespread. 40 % of the population has become so used to status quo they do not believe that a settlement will ever happen. Normalization will generate new wealth and prosperity. Cyprus could become a genuine financial and service hub. A recent Eastern Mediterranean survey showed that a settlement would add a minimum 10 percentage points to the Cypriot economy

TURKEY'S EU VOCATION

Those who dismiss Turkey's membership tend to forget one key factor. Turkey is an essential component of European security, social and economic architecture which can not be wished away. The question on our membership should not be why but when. My answer would be as soon as feasible.

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It is worth mentioning that we all tend to interpret events from our own windows. Those who criticize or denounce Turkish military presence in Cyprus, forget about the deep rooted and well documented security concerns of the Turkish Cypriots. They also forget that by accepting the Annan plan, Turkey and the Turkish Cypriots had undertaken to bring down the Turkish military presence to a very symbolic figure of 650 as opposed to a Greek military force of 950 persons.

By the same token, it would be unfair to complain about the poor state of historical or archeological sites in northern Cyprus while the Turkish Cypriots are isolated and prevented from any international cooperation. But instead of dwelling upon past grievances, which are no doubt mutual, I want to convey a positive message. Let us all help to tear down the walls that have kept Cyprus in a state of prison and try to create a more secure, stable and contemporary environment to eastern Mediterranean.