

Introduction: The Burden of History, Image, Geopolitics and Misperception in the Aegean

Mustafa Aydin & Kostas Ifantis

To cite this article: Mustafa Aydin & Kostas Ifantis (17 Feb 2024): Introduction: The Burden of History, Image, Geopolitics and Misperception in the Aegean, Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies, DOI: [10.1080/19448953.2024.2318674](https://doi.org/10.1080/19448953.2024.2318674)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/19448953.2024.2318674>



Published online: 17 Feb 2024.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)





View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



Introduction: The Burden of History, Image, Geopolitics and Misperception in the Aegean

Mustafa Aydin ^a and Kostas Ifantis ^b

^aDepartment of International Relations, Kadir Has University, Istanbul, Turkey; ^bDepartment of International Relations, Panteion University, Athens, Greece

ABSTRACT

This short paper provides an overview of the complex and often turbulent relations between Greece and Turkey, focussing on recent developments and the challenges in their bilateral relationship. It discusses the historical context, including attempts at reconciliation, and examines the role of perceptions, geopolitics, and historical grievances in shaping the current situation. It emphasises the cyclical nature of Greek-Turkish relations, with periods of calm followed by tensions and crises. It highlights the need for a comprehensive approach to resolving the existing disputes between the two countries, including the importance of confidence-building measures and a political settlement. Overall, it underlines the complexity of Greek-Turkish relations and the challenges in achieving lasting peace and stability in the region, calling for a new paradigm in bilateral relations that addresses historical grievances, promotes mutual understanding, and fosters cooperation for the benefit of both countries and the region.

KEYWORDS

Greek-Turkish Relations;
Perception; Conflict;
Rapprochement; Geopolitics

It has already been twenty years since the publication of a collection of essays that we co-edited to discuss the relationship between Greece and Turkey following a decade of major crises.¹ Looking into what we saw as a classic case of ‘security dilemma’² across the Aegean, where each state endlessly tried to secure itself with steps against real or imagined threats from the other, eroding the first state’s security and finding itself in a spiral. We described this state of affairs in Greek-Turkish relations as a ‘protracted conflict disrupted by shorter or longer détente(s)’.³ It was the first time that Turkish and Greek academics coexisted on a volume on Greek-Turkish relations, without a third party involvement, under a Greek-Turkish co-editorship, trying to gauge whether the so-called rapprochement process that has been going on in Greek-Turkish relations would finally break the cycle.

The 1990s had started cautiously optimistic that a breakthrough in traditional disputes could be reached.⁴ However, the standoff over Imia/Kardak in January 1996 showcased how fragile and crisis-prone the relationship was. Relations deteriorated further in 1999 with the ‘Öcalan affair’, which ended in Greece with the resignation of three ministers, inducing restraint for Turkey in response and thus paving the way to forthcoming rapprochement between the two countries.⁵ The

destructive earthquakes of the summer of 1999 in Turkey and Greece provided an opening not so much for a political initiative but for an outpour of public empathy. Politics followed. It was one of those rare moments when both governments seized the popular momentum and worked effectively to de-escalate diplomatic tensions and a normalization process.

That process facilitated an understanding that took advantage of the Turkish desire to boost its EU accession prospects⁶ and the Greek strategic shift to support it.⁷ The result was the most extended period of calm in recent memory. The problem, however, was that the 'breakthrough' was inconclusive. Although bilateral relations flourished in several policy areas, such as trade, culture, and tourism, the two sides were not daring enough to move decisively in the areas that mattered. The two initiated exploratory talks to discuss problems of delimitation of maritime zones in the Aegean and the Eastern Mediterranean and other thorny issues on 12 March 2002 to find a fair, sustainable, and inclusive solution.⁸ No less than sixty rounds of talks were held up until 2016⁹ when it was put on hiatus following the failed military coup in Turkey. Though bilateral discussions continued through political consultations, the rising tension in the Eastern Mediterranean intervened, and the two countries did not return to the exploratory framework until January 2021. When resumed, the two sides did not even agree on what to call them - Turkey asked for consultative or proximity talks while Greece insisted on exploratory talks- and their content was not as extensive.

The resumption came after a period of high tension, toxic rhetoric, and a naval standoff that brought the two very close to a military engagement. A crisis was stirred in the summer of 2020 after Turkey, in reaction to various agreements between the Republic of Cyprus (RoC), Egypt, Israel, and Greece that left it isolated in the region, sent a research vessel escorted by warships to conduct a series of tests for energy resources in the Eastern Mediterranean in an undelimited maritime area that both countries claim being over their continental shelf, thus having exclusive economic rights. Responding to calls from Greece and RoC to react to Turkish moves, in December 2020, the EU gave the green light to expand sanctions against Turkey over its exploration of gas reserves in waters claimed by EU members Greece and RoC. Initially, the sanctions were placed against Turkey in November 2019 and targeted persons' planning, preparing ... participating in, directing, or assisting' drilling activities on the coast of Cyprus.¹⁰

There is a strong sense of déjà vu among all those familiar with the historical trajectory of the relations between Turkey and Greece. Like 1999, today we are again hopeful for a breakthrough that has long eluded the two nations. As a matter of fact, it is considered naïve to expect something other than the usual state of affairs. Shorter or longer cycles of calm are interrupted by tension and the occasional crisis. Very few do not subscribe to a fatalistic understanding of an inherently conflictual relationship. It is a competitive, crisis-prone, and militarized interaction even when things look peaceful and optimistic.

This has been reflected in relevant literature and the theoretical treatise that the academic community in the two countries and beyond has accorded at large to the understanding and explaining of the bilateral relationship. Mainstream positivist classical realist, neorealist, neoclassical realist, and liberal institutionalist theorizing have been dominant.¹¹ Moreover, even atheoretical or policy-oriented works are implicit in their predominantly realist and institutionalist references. Some have tried to present alternative avenues, employing various concepts from 'chosen trauma'¹² to 'otherisation'¹³ to

uncover elements that defy realist explanations. Even in these works, it is hard to entirely dissent from power politics narratives.¹⁴

The contributors in this special issue draw on a much more comprehensive array of international relations theories to suggest that sources of stability and instability in the Aegean and the Eastern Mediterranean are to be found in security relations but also in identity and cultural discourses, in patriarchal and class societal structures and even at the intersection of some of those.

How accurate are the various theoretical explanations when compared with empirical reality? Almost all papers argue explicitly or implicitly that traditional conceptions of the balance of power may not be able to capture fully the security behaviour of either Greece or Turkey. And that might be true. According to Paul, the exclusive focus of classical and neorealist theories on interstate military balancing has made the balance of power theorizing less flexible.¹⁵ However, where he proposes a broader conceptualization of balancing behaviour to explain national strategies, the contributors to this special issue reflect on several questions about the role and significance of other constitutive and non-constitutive elements in the Greek-Turkish policy and social arenas. The aim is to offer a better and novel understanding of the bilateral interaction and, above all, why the Greek-Turkish relationship continues to hold the potential for traditional geopolitical antagonism and conflict, as well as why it is so hard to escape a security culture of hopelessly unresolved problems, enduring security dilemmas, crisis-prone geopolitics. The following section describes the current state of affairs following a familiar tension and enmity period.

A déjà vu

During the Summer of 2020, the Eastern Mediterranean became the eye of an all-threatening geopolitical storm.¹⁶ Conflict emerged when Turkey started a seismic exploration mission in disputed waters with its *Oruç Reis* survey vessel, accompanied by naval ships. As Greece had considered Turkish gas exploration in the area illegal, it responded by announcing naval exercises nearby to the south of Turkey and the Greek island of Kastellorizo, just over one mile from the Turkish coast.¹⁷ Those watching held their breath as a Turkish and a Greek frigate had collided only two weeks earlier during the most nail-biting naval standoff between the two since the Imia/Kardak crisis.

The 2020 escalation confirmed that it does not matter how many years of peace and stability have passed. The territorial disputes' carry an unprecedented potential for spiralling into a Mediterranean-wide, multi-national conflict'.¹⁸ The escalation had broader geopolitical implications. Greece and Turkey are both members of NATO, while Greece is a member of the EU. The crisis threatened the unity of both and severely undermined their crisis management abilities.¹⁹ France stood with Greece by sending warships to the area²⁰ and dispatching its flagship Charles de Gaulle nuclear aircraft carrier. Also, Egypt and Israel expressed their solidarity. Egypt conducted joint naval exercises with France and Greece, while the United Arab Emirates (UAE) sent its F-16 fighters to perform joint air force exercises with Greece and France in the air space over the Eastern Mediterranean. Even Saudi Arabia sent a couple of F-35s to Greece for joint exercises. With these states already harbouring competing views and interests with Turkey in Libya, Syria, and elsewhere, the risk of escalation in the Eastern

Mediterranean getting out of hand and generating ‘a geopolitical maelstrom across the wider region’²¹ was considered very high. By the end of September, the two countries had returned from the brink of military confrontation over gas exploration in disputed waters. This crisis was perhaps the most serious and the longest-lasting in a cycle of periodic flare-ups since the 1970s. Regional turmoil and violent geopolitical shifts have made the situation more volatile than ever before.²²

In a familiar turn of events, the devastating earthquakes in Turkey in February 2023 fuelled an improvement in relations. It was the ‘familiar unpredictable’ like in 1999. The government of Greece sent tens of thousands of tents, beds, and blankets to the disaster zone to help survivors. It also deployed fully equipped teams of rescue professionals, doctors, and paramedics to the region. On 12 February 2023, Greek Foreign Minister Nikos Dendias visited the earthquake zone, becoming the first high-ranking official from an EU member state to do so, and the Greek citizens shared messages of solidarity on social media.²³ The climate improved overnight, and although none dared to talk about a new page or a new beginning,²⁴ civil society continuously encouraged the leaders of both countries²⁵ and momentum built up. Following elections in both countries in June 2023, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis, both triumphant, met in July for the first time in 16 months and agreed to build on the ‘positive momentum’ between the long-estranged neighbours. Meeting on the sidelines of the July 11–12 NATO summit in Vilnius, they pledged to ‘activate multiple channels of communication’ between the two governments.²⁶

The two leaders met twice in the second half of 2023 to consolidate the conditions for de-escalation. They met on the sidelines of the 78th session of the UN General Assembly in New York on 20 September 2023, confirmed the favourable climate, and expressed their determination to preserve it. They also confirmed the roadmap and timeline of contacts between the two countries, including a forthcoming Türkiye-Greece High-Level Cooperation Council meeting on 7 December in Greece. Furthermore, a development of major symbolic significance took place during the meeting. The two leaders signed a joint declaration, pledging to maintain good and friendly neighbourly relations. The Athens Declaration is important because it recognizes the political willingness to try to find a way towards a permanent reconciliation. Although it clearly states that it does not constitute an international agreement binding upon the parties under international law, it is nevertheless a statement of their determination to foster friendly relations and resolve their disputes peacefully.

On the practical side, they agreed to engage each other through three parallel processes: First, the process of political dialogue, which includes the revived exploratory talks; second, the so-called ‘Positive Agenda’, which involves upgrading their cooperation in the fields of business-economy, tourism, transportation, energy, innovation, science and technology, agriculture, environmental protection, social security and health, youth, education, sports, etc.; and third, the Confidence Building Measures process, which should involve measures in the military field, aiming at contributing to the elimination of unwarranted sources of tension and inadvertent escalation.²⁷

This is the state of affairs at the time of writing this introduction. People have been there before in both countries, and there is a feeling of urgency on both sides, emanating from the fear that this opportunity might be lost again if not seized within a reasonable period. The current ‘Rapprochement 2.0’ will likely prove sustainable in the short term.

The real challenge is moving beyond a good atmosphere and various trade deals. It has always been. More than 100 bilateral agreements were signed between the two countries in 2000–2013 to enhance closer economic relations only.²⁸ However, this was not enough to move on to solving the thorny issues. The amount of goodwill Ankara and Athens can generate is necessary, but it will not be the only determination about whether Turkey and Greece can begin to address long-standing territorial disputes. By any measure, that remains a remote possibility. What is needed now is new ideas in the context of a compromise that requires a significant transformation in strategic thinking in both countries.

Compromises are, however, something significant majorities in both countries oppose, especially when linked with concessions, even though populations on both sides generally support better relations through political solutions to the problems.²⁹ Assigning ‘national’ character to almost all the issues between the two countries, including both low and high political matters, creates a robust nationalist backlash on both sides of the Aegean for negotiated solutions -thus, by implication, compromised- solutions. The thought-provoking point here is that the supposed avarice towards a compromise -and concession- are taken at face value on both sides, as there has not been a time in recent memory when the negotiators reached a compromise solution and put it to the approval of the people, accept the early 20th century when negotiated Lausanne Treaty created conditions that allowed cordial relations until the late 1950s and still provides the legal framework for better or worse to ties between the two countries.³⁰

History has repeatedly proven that it is tough to develop new ideas. It is even more challenging to reconceptualize the relationship in a cooperative way. There is a strong perception and deep-rooted belief that the relationship will never be free of prejudice, mistrust, mutual—although asymmetrical—threat perception, geopolitical misperceptions, cultural and identity biases, and competing national history narratives.³¹

History as an impediment

One obstacle that stifles a reasonable discussion of the problems is the distrust between the two nations created and encouraged by their living history, as the ‘history is not past . . . [it] continues to live in the present’ in both countries.³² The two nations’ histories are so intertwined that it is impossible to understand their modern conditions without referencing the other. However, this is precisely what the two countries are trying to do. Although they share a common heritage of a Byzantine-Ottoman-Levantine history, still shaping their daily lives, neither country is willing to accept it wholly.

Greece celebrated the 200th anniversary of its independence in 2021, and Turkey celebrated its 100th in 2023. Though not mentioned much during the celebratory events, the popular Turkish image of the Greek ‘war of independence’ is a rebellion instigated and supported by the great powers of the 19th century, who ‘used’ the Greeks to break up the Ottoman Empire. Similarly, modern Turkey’s ‘war of national liberation’ was mainly waged against the occupying Greek forces in Western Anatolia after the First World War, still remembered by the Greeks as the ‘Asia Minor Catastrophe’.³³

While Greek historiography conveniently forgets its Ottoman past, preferring not to acknowledge its rule over territories that make up modern Greece today, and tries to

create a comfortable past reaching to ancient Greece and the Byzantine state, Turkish historiography selectively reads its Ottoman past, where non-Turks (among them Rums or Ottoman Greeks) do not appear in principal roles.³⁴ In such a selective history reading, the best-delineated parts of their identities are their national struggles for independence, defined in opposition to the other.³⁵ However, while ignoring their shared heritage, the two countries have created a challenging psycho-political environment by emphasizing confrontation and conflict. Under such conditions, overcoming the mistrust, stereotypes, and fears fundamental to their national identities has become difficult.³⁶

Moreover, as is often the case between long-standing neighbours bound by chronic distrust, the history of relations between Greece and Turkey is littered with a long list of past failures and deceptions. This leads to a situation where in the absence of a common external threat to their existence forcing them closer to cooperation, it remains convenient not to challenge the historical stereotypes and even reinforce the distrust with real or imagined encroachments on national territories and reaches every time a crisis looms on the horizon.³⁷

It is difficult to overcome such overwhelmingly negative psychology with simple goodwill gestures, though they are undoubtedly needed. Even the well-intentioned efforts on both sides would not be enough to ensure genuine harmony. What is needed is a long-term commitment to binding confidence-building measures and political settlement. So far, neither side has shown such determination.

(Mis)perception and geopolitics across the sea

What we have in the Aegean is a competing view of how each perceives the other and the potential ways to minimize the risk of crisis. A fundamental element of the Greek-Turkish 'tug of war' is the mutual perception of threat and expansionist imagination. Given the disparity between the two countries' resources and population, the threat perceptions on both sides of the Aegean have not been symmetric though constant. While not many people believe it would be reasonable to expect a change of status quo over the Aegean using force, sustained uncertainties about each other's intentions frequently transform into a spiral of insecurity.

While Greece considers Turkey a revisionist state since the 1974 Cyprus confrontation and tries to counter it by both establishing regional and international partnerships and alliance agreements with major powers and, more recently, utilizing its advantageous EU membership status, Turkish security evaluations start with counting stages of 'historic Greek expansionism' that was temporarily stopped by Turkish force in 1974 but looks for new opportunities if Turkey is not strong enough. Greece's attempts to balance Turkey's power across the Aegean with partnership and alliances are perceived by Turkey as third-party involvement, reminiscence of the Ottoman era interventions of European powers on behalf of Greece, thus reinforcing the existing images of historical parallelism. This further complicates an already very complex relationship. Hence, Ankara prefers to attempt to resolve the disputes between the two countries primarily through bilateral negotiations without outside interference or influence.

While the threat that Greece perceives from Turkey fluctuates in tandem with the status of the military balance between the two countries and strongly interacts with the threat of the use of force by Turkish leadership, Turkish threat perceptions from Greece

are usually a function of the latter's ability to utilize its international connections in balancing Turkey. Thus, Greece's recently improved military relations with the US, leading to the upgrading of various NATO/US bases on Greek soil as well as the establishment of new military installations and the signing of a new Franco-Greek Defence Pact on 27 September 2021,³⁸ has led to excessive increase in Turkey's threat perception across the Aegean.

The fact that more Greeks consider Turkey a 'threat' and most Turks do not attribute priority to the 'Greek threat' befits the disparity in power and resources between the two countries. While it was recorded that up to 90% of the Greeks believed that Turkey threatened Greece in the mid-1980s when the late Greek Prime Minister Andreas Papandreou started to use the 'threat from the East' rhetoric,³⁹ recently, this has declined to 55.5.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, Greece continues to nurture a strong sense of perceived Turkish threat. While this partly emanates from threatening rhetoric occasionally used by the Turkish leadership,⁴¹ it is also based on the emerging imbalance across the Aegean in the 2000s due to Greece's economic crisis and the resulting inability to sustain its military spending on par with Turkey. These led recently, after Greece's recovery from the financial crisis and following the rising tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean in the summer of 2020, to extensive spending on a considerable armament programme that involves 4,5 generation Rafale fighter jets, 3 + 1 state-of-the-art frigates, 40 F-35 5th generation stealth fighter jets, and numerous other defence modernization projects. This forced Turkey to re-examine some of its armament choices in recent years, such as acquiring S400 missiles from Russia to the detriment of participating in the 5th generation F35 fighter plane production programme and re-evaluating its air and naval forces structures.

This is a classic case of 'spiral' and 'deterrence',⁴² where 'what seems sufficient to one state's defence will seem, and will often be, offensive to its neighbours [who] . . . will react by trying to strengthen their positions. States can trigger these reactions even if they have no expansionist inclinations.⁴³ The only way to escape the trappings of this lockdown towards a 'new militarisation cycle'⁴⁴ in the relations is to provide 'perfect knowledge that the other was arming strictly for defensive purposes'.⁴⁵ What is happening now is the opposite, as both states are trying to acquire and produce, in the Turkish case, further weapon systems to counterbalance the other.

On the Turkish side, although Greece regularly appears in polls among the 'threats' perceived by the Turkish people, it is never at the top of the list. In the December 2022 poll conducted by Aydın et al.,⁴⁶ it appears below the US, Israel, Syria, Armenia, and the UK, with 49,4% of the population seeing it as a threat and 31,3% not threatening and 19,5% registering 'I do not know' response. Conversely, only 21,1% in 2022 saw Greece as a 'friendly' country, with 60,6% saying that it is 'not a friendly country', obviously registering the problematic nature of the relations between the two countries. Moreover, while 'tensions in the eastern Mediterranean' were not seen by the Turkish public among the 'most important issues in Turkish foreign policy', 'militarisation of the Eastern Aegean islands' by Greece was perceived as the most challenging (51,4 per cent) aspect of the Greek-Turkish relations, alongside with the 'maritime jurisdiction problems in the Aegean' (51,6 per cent), clearly linking the two issues.⁴⁷

Conclusion

Greece and Turkey, after half a century of conflict, distrust, and Hobbesian fear, have arrived once again at a point in attempting to untie the knot in the Turkish-Greek crisis-ridden state of affairs. There is a feeling, however, and that is the undercurrent of this collection of papers, that moving forward, despite the existing security dilemma between the two nations, requires more than ever the ability to look at their dispute from almost every available policy angle and adopt out-of-box measures. What makes this so intractable is the unique amalgamation of shared history, culture, and geopolitics that have created (mis)perceptions constantly feeding into domestic political discourses on both sides. It is interesting to observe how maximalist the rhetoric on both sides becomes when engaged in a conflict spiral; thus, anything less becomes impossible to argue unless one risks going against the 'national' interest.

The two countries have just emerged from one of the most intense periods of tension in their relations. Attempts at normalization need to embrace a more integrated picture of what needs to be done, how it fits into what is happening currently around the world, and how it relates to a more collective—both regional and global—set of interests and strategic imperatives. What is quite different in 'Rapprochement 2.0' from its predecessor is that there is accumulated experience from the previous round on what to do and not to do, thus the reasonably quick achievement to sign several agreements on 7 December 2024 to move forward, and that international involvement, whether as encouragement or threat, is minimal this time. The EU, an essential anchor in the last round, and the US, which has almost always been a cooling third power when the two countries were locked in a conflict spiral, are barely visible. France and Germany, which appeared one way or another as involved third parties during the last flare-up between June 2020 and February 2023, are not engaged in the current process, perhaps accepting slight encouragement from the side. This is an uncharted territory even though the feeling of *déjà vu* is present in terms of familiarity with issues and steps taken so far.

What is new and required is a political drive for a radical change of paradigm that can produce a much more global—strategic outlook—and broader in geographical and functional terms. In this context, the 7 December Athens meeting was a significant breakthrough in that it showed the willingness of the two newly re-elected leaders, who will not face another national election in the next four years under normal circumstances, to push for the rehabilitation of the relationship. It is not the end of the road but the beginning. This time, the two countries benefit from the rapprochement of the 1990s and 60+ rounds of exploratory talks.

What is now needed is an overall framework that can facilitate a grand compromise with at least three strategic priorities. These priorities should reinforce Europe's ties with Turkey, shape a more stable Eastern Mediterranean system, and promote a more substantial and reciprocal bilateral engagement. Above all is tackling the outstanding delimitation issues head-on that have poisoned relations for over fifty years. We hope that the papers in this collection will help in this endeavour.

Notes

- [1] M. Aydin and K. Ifantis (eds), *Turkish-Greek Relations: The Security Dilemma in the Aegean*, Routledge, London and New York, 2004.
- [2] See R. Jervis, 'Cooperation under the Security Dilemma', *World Politics*, Vol. 30, No 2, 1978, pp. 167–214.
- [3] Aydin and Ifantis, op. cit., p. 1. The more well-known era of cooperative relations was during the 1920s and 30s after the two nations went into a bloody debacle following the First World War, which gave way to an extraordinary era of reconciliation under the guidance of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and Elefteros Venizelos. Another such era was ushered after the end of the Second World War when the two states found themselves within the Western Alliance facing same threat. It continued until the late 1950s when the 'Cyprus issue' emerged as a problem between them. See C. Dodd, *The History and Politics of the Cyprus Conflict*, Basingstoke, Palgrave MacMillan, 2010.
- [4] M Aydin, 'Crypto-Optimism in Greek-Turkish Relations: What Is Next?', *Journal of Southern Europe and the Balkans*, Vol 5, No. 2, August 2003, pp. 223–240.
- [5] R. Aliboni and D. Pioppi, 'The Öcalan Affair Revisited', *The International Spectator*, Vol. 35, No 3, 2000, pp. 37–47.
- [6] Z. Öniş, 'Greek-Turkish Relations and the European Union: A Critical Perspective', *Mediterranean Politics*, Vol. 6, No. 3, 2001, pp. 31–45; M. Aydin and S. Açıkmeşe, 'Europeanization through EU Conditionality: Understanding the New Era in Turkish Foreign Policy', *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, Vol. 9, No 3, 2007, pp. 273–285; G. Koukoudakis, 'Explaining the Endurance of Greek-Turkish Rapprochement Process', *Uluslararası İlişkiler*, Vol. 11, No. 44, 2015, pp. 81–100.
- [7] Kostas Ifantis called that strategy 'balancing engagement'. See K. Ifantis, 'Perception and Rapprochement: Debating a Greek Strategy Towards Turkey', in Aydin and Ifantis, op. cit, pp. 246–268. On this, see also, P. Tsakonas, *The Incomplete Breakthrough in Greek-Turkish Relations. Grasping Greece's Socialization Strategy*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke and New York, 2010. Also, P. Tsakonas and K. Ifantis, 'Greece's Foreign Policy Reform in the Late 1990s: The "Helsinki" Strategic Shift', in A. Klapsis (ed), *Greece and the EU. 50 Years of Membership*, Eburon, Utrecht, 2022, pp. 109–122.
- [8] The talks between Turkey and Greece to address bilateral disputes have a history that goes back to the early 1970s. But those talks have only been institutionalized by exploratory talks during the rapprochement process started by late Turkish Foreign Minister İsmail Cem and his then Greek counterpart Giorgos Papandreu.
- [9] As the contents of the talks were kept strictly confidential by a mutual agreement, a welcome first in the long years of Greek-Turkish talks, it is difficult to know what ground has been covered and whether they achieved any convergence on diverging views, though it has recently trickled out from various people who were privy to talks that serious ground was covered especially in 2003–2004 and 2010–2011. See Hasan Göğüş, 'Can exploratory talks solve Turkish-Greek Maritime Issues?', *Yetkin Report*, 30, January 2021, <https://yetkinreport.com/en/2021/01/30/can-exploratory-talks-solve-turkish-greek-maritime-issues/> (accessed 17 January 2024).
- [10] See 'Council Decision (CFSP) 2019/1894 of 11 November 2019 concerning restrictive measures in view of Turkey's unauthorized drilling activities in the Eastern Mediterranean', ST/13262/2019/INIT, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv:OJ.L_.2019.291.01.0047.01.ENG&toc=OJ:L:2019:291:TOC (accessed 03 February 2024).
- [11] The literature is vast. Prominent examples of realist and institutionalist papers are Van Coufoudakis, 'Greek-Turkish Relations, 1973–1983: The View from Athens', *International Security*, 9(4), 1985, pp. 185–217; M. Aydin, 'Cacophony in the Aegean; Contemporary Turkish-Greek Relations', *Turkish Yearbook of International Relations*, No. 17, 1997, pp. 109–140; R. Krebs, 'Perverse Institutionalism: NATO and the Greco-Turkish Conflict', *International Organization*, 53(2), 1999, pp. 343–377; T. Couloumbis and K. Ifantis,

- ‘Altering the Security Dilemma in the Aegean: Greek Strategic Options and Structural Constraints—A Realist Approach’, *The Review of International Affairs*, Vol 2, No 2, 2002, pp. 1–25; Z. Öniş and Ş. Yılmaz, ‘Greek-Turkish Rapprochement: Rhetoric or Reality?’, *Political Science Quarterly*, 123(1), 2008, pp. 123–149; K. Ifantis, ‘Greece’s Strategy and Perceptions Towards Turkey: The End of Consensus and the Return of History?’, *Uluslararası İlişkiler*, Vol. 15, No 58, 2018, pp. 93–106.
- [12] See V. D. Volkan and N. Itzkowitz, ‘Modern Greek and Turkish Identities and the Psychodynamics of Greek—Turkish Relations’, in A. C. G. M. Robben and M. M. Suárez-Orozco (eds.), *Cultures Under Siege: Collective Violence and Trauma*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000, pp. 227–247; A. Heraclides, *The Essence of the Greek-Turkish Rivalry: National Narrative and Identity*, London, LSE, Hellenic Observatory Papers on Greece and Southeast Europe, No 51, October 2011, <https://eprints.lse.ac.uk/45693/1/GreeSE%20No51.pdf> (accessed 01 February 2024).
- [13] F. A. Ergül, *The Formation of Turkish National Identity: The Role of the Greek ‘Other’*, Unpublished PhD Thesis, Ankara, Middle East Technical University, September 2009, <https://hdl.handle.net/11511/18917> (accessed 01 February 2024).
- [14] See, for example, B. Rumelili, ‘Civil Society and the Europeanization of Greek-Turkish Cooperation’, *South European Society & Politics*, 10, 2005, pp. 45–56; D. Ş. Sert and K. Travlos, ‘Making a Case over Greco-Turkish Rivalry: Major Power Linkages and Rivalry Strength’, *Uluslararası İlişkiler*, Vol. 15, No 59, 2018, pp. 105–127; and D. Triantaphyllou, ‘Greek Foreign Policy in Defence of the National Interest: Teetering between Exceptionalism and Integration’, *Uluslararası İlişkiler*, Vol. 15, No 58, 2018, pp. 107–117. Prominent has been the work of Hercules Millas, Alexis Heraclides, and others. A very interesting collection is to be found in Z. Mert Uzuner (ed.), *Role of Image in Greek-Turkish Relations*, Peter Lang, Berlin 2018.
- [15] T. V. Paul, ‘Introduction: The Enduring Axioms of Balance of Power Theory and their Contemporary relevance’, in T. V. Paul, J. Wirtz and M. Fortmann (eds.), *Balance of Power: Theory and Practice in the 21st Century*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, p. 13.
- [16] M. Tanchum, ‘How Did the Eastern Mediterranean Become the Eye of a Geopolitical Storm’, *Foreign Policy*, 18 August 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/08/18/eastern-mediterranean-greece-turkey-warship-geopolitical-showdown/> (accessed 17 January 2024).
- [17] G. Tüysüz, ‘NATO allies are facing off in the Eastern Mediterranean. The conflict could entangle the entire region’, CNN International, 26 August 2020, https://edition.cnn.com/2020/08/25/europe/greece-turkey-eastern-mediterranean-tension-intl/index.html?utm_campaign=Feed%3A+rss%2Fedition_world+%28RSS%3A+CNNi+World%29&utm_medium=feed&utm_source=feedburner (accessed 01 February 2024).
- [18] M. Tanchum, ‘Eastern Mediterranean in Uncharted Waters: Perspectives on Emerging Geopolitical Realities’, *Konrad Adenauer Stiftung*, 2020, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep28862.5> (accessed 17 January 2024).
- [19] *Ibid.* Both countries have variously attempted to utilize their western connections in their bilateral disputes to support them against their opponent and solidify their place within the Western state system. Aydın, ‘Crypto-Optimism in Greek-Turkish Relations’.
- [20] ‘All-seeing French frigate flies flag in tense east Mediterranean’, *France24*, 30 October 2020, <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20201030-all-seeing-french-frigate-flies-flag-in-tense-east-mediterranean> (accessed 18 January 2024).
- [21] Tanchum, ‘Eastern Mediterranean in Uncharted Waters’, *op. cit.*
- [22] ‘Turkey-Greece: From Maritime Brinkmanship to Dialogue Europe’, *International Crisis Group*, Report No 263, 31 May 2021, <https://icg-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/263-turkey-greece-maritime.pdf> (accessed 15 December 2023).
- [23] D. Bechev, ‘Facing tragedy, Turkey mends ties with Greece and Armenia’, *Aljazeera*, 27 February 2023, <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2023/2/27/turkey-earthquake-diplomacy> (accessed 18 December 2023).
- [24] F. Doulgkeri, ‘Can an earthquake once again improve relations between Turkey and Greece?’, *Euronews*, 16 May 2023, <https://www.euronews.com/2023/05/16/can-an>

earthquake-once-again-improve-relations-between-turkey-and-greece (accessed 18 December 2023).

- [25] See various statements at this time from the Greek Turkish Forum, a one-and-a-half-track diplomacy initiative, founded in late 1997 following the Imia/Kardak crises to promote dialogue and communication between Greece and Turkey. The fact that it released a statement almost every month at this period shows how much expectation were built up. <http://greekturkishforum.com/statements/> (accessed 03 February 2024).
- [26] N. Stamouli, 'Greece and Turkey seek fresh start to bilateral relations', *Politico*, 13 July 2023, <https://www.politico.eu/article/greece-pm-kyriakos-mitsotakis-turkey-president-recep-tayyip-erdogan-agree-fresh-start-bilateral-relations-vilnius/> (accessed 22 December 2023).
- [27] 'Mitsotakis, Erdogan sign "Athens Declaration on Friendly Relations and Good-Neighborliness"', *e-Kathimerini*, 7 December 2023, <https://www.ekathimerini.com/news/1226607/athens-declaration-expected-to-be-signed-between-greece-turkey/> (accessed 22 December 2023).
- [28] Koukoudakis, 'Explaining the Endurance of Greek-Turkish Rapprochement Process', op. cit, p. 86.
- [29] See E. Balta and I. Grigoriadis, *The Evolution of Public Opinion in Greece and Turkey (2021–2023): Dynamics and Shifts in Comparative Perspective*, Athens, Eliamep, Working Paper No 123, January 2024, <https://www.eliamep.gr/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Working-paper123-Report-FINAL.pdf> (accessed 1 February 2024); and M. Aydin et al, *Quantitative Research Report: Public Perception on Turkish Foreign Policy 2022*, Istanbul, Kadir Has University, Global Academy, Akademetre, 8 September 2022, https://www.globacademy.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/TDP_2022_ENG_FINAL_07.09.22.pdf (accessed 03 February 2024).
- [30] the 100th anniversary of signing the Lausanne Peace Treaty in 1923, witnessed reassessments and evaluations in both countries. At least in one case, it even brought together Greeks and Turks, looking into the legacy of the Treaty to find ways forward in Greek-Turkish relations in the 21st century. See panel on 'The Significance of the Treaty of Lausanne Today', *International Conference, 100 Years Since the Treaty of Lausanne*, 12–13 June 2023, Eliamep and National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Athens, Greece. It is interesting to note that the Lausanne Treaty is still venerated as a 'foundational legal document', thus 'sacrosanct' in a way, on both sides, and violations are unacceptable. However, the public and elite perception on both sides is that the other side is trying to change 'the Lausanne Status' in the Aegean.
- [31] H. Millas, 'National Perception of the "Other" and the Persistence of Some Images', in Aydin and Ifantis, op. cit. pp. 53–66.
- [32] M. Aydin, 'Greece-Turkey Relations', A. Özerdem and A. E. Öztürk (eds.), *A Companion to Modern Turkey's Centennial*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2023, pp 329–330. See also Ş. S. Gürel, *Tarihsel Boyut İçinde Türk-Yunan İlişkileri, 1821–1993*, Ankara, Ümit, 1993; and B. Gökay, 'Angels and Demons: Construction and Representations of the Enemy Image in Greece and Turkey', in N. K. Burçoğlu (ed.), *The Image of the Turk in Europe from the Declaration of the Republic in 1923 to the 1990s*, İstanbul, ISIS Press, 2000, pp. 395–411.
- [33] P. K. Jensen, 'The Greco-Turkish War, 1920–1922', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 10, No 4, 1979, pp. 553–565.
- [34] Millas, 'National Perception of the "Other" and the Persistence of Some Images', op. cit.; and B. Ersanlı, *İktidar ve Tarih: Türkiye'de 'Resmi Tarih' Tezinin Oluşumu, 1929–1937*, İstanbul, Alfa, 1992, p. 52.
- [35] A. J. R. Groom, 'Cyprus, Greece and Turkey: A Treadmill for Diplomacy', in John T. A. Koumoulides (ed.), *Cyprus in Transition, 1960–1985*, London, Trigraph, 1986, p. 152.
- [36] R. Clogg, 'The Troubled Alliance: Greece and Turkey' in R. Clogg (ed.), *Greece in the 1980s*, New York, St Martin's, 1980, p. 141.
- [37] M. Aydin, 'Distrust and Hypocrisy in Greek-Turkish Relations', *Yetkin Report*, 8 September 2020, <https://yetkinreport.com/en/?s=Distrust+and+Hypocrisy> (accessed 01 February 2024).

- [38] ‘Greek parliament approves defence pact with France’, *Reuters*, 7 October 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/greece-france-defence-pact-protects-against-third-party-aggression-greek-pm-2021-10-07/> (accessed 03 February 2024).
- [39] P. E. Dimitras, ‘Greece: A New Danger’, *Foreign Policy*, Vol. 58, Spring 1985, p. 137. Moreover, 63% of the Greeks expressed distrust of Turks. See J. Catsiapis, ‘L’attitude de la Grèce face à la demande d’adhésion de la Turquie aux Communautés Européennes’, *CEMOTI*, Vol. 8, 1989, p. 116. To be more precise, it was the Evangelos Averof, Defence Minister during the 1974–1981 period, who first coined the phrase ‘Danger from the East’.
- [40] Responding to a ‘likelihood of conflict’ question, data for 2023 revealed that 55.5 per cent of Greeks (and only 25.2 per cent of Turks) are worried about a ‘hot episode’ or war scenario. This is a strong indication of a diminishing but still significant concern in Greek public opinion regarding the possibility of an armed conflict. See Balta and Grigoriadis, ‘The Evolution of Public Opinion in Greece and Turkey’, *op. cit.*
- [41] See for example, K. Karakaya, ‘Turkey’s Leader Warns Greece Its Missiles Can Hit Athens’, *Bloomberg*, 11 December 2022, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-12-11/turkey-greece-tensions-erdogan-warns-missiles-can-hit-athens> (accessed 10 December 2023).
- [42] The work of the late Robert Jervis is instrumental here. Through his model, we can explain how decision-makers in one state try to navigate the uncertainties and risks about the intentions of competitors with the military capability to inflict harm against them. The ‘spiral’ is driven by the mutual misperceptions between adversaries of each other’s intentions. At the root of this is the insecurity and fear generated by the anarchic nature of international politics. See R. Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1976.
- [43] B. R. Posen, ‘The Security Dilemma and Ethnic Conflict’, in M. Brown (ed.), *Ethnic Conflict and International Security*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1993, p. 104.
- [44] M. Aydin, presentation at the Panel on ‘The State of Greek-Turkish Relations within the NATO Context’, *Greek-Turkish Young Leaders Symposium*, 24–27 November 2021, Athens, Greece.
- [45] Aydin and Ifantis, *op. cit.*, p. 3, citing D. A. Lake and D. Rothchild, ‘Containing Fear: The Origins and Management of Ethnic Conflict’, *International Security*, Vol. 21, No 2, 1996, pp. 41–75.
- [46] M. Aydin et al., *Quantitative Research Report: Turkey Trends 2022*, 17 January 2023, İstanbul, Global Academy and Akademetre.
- [47] Aydin et al., *Public Perception on Turkish Foreign Policy 2022*, *op. cit.*

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

ORCID

Mustafa Aydin  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-4029-6681>

Kostas Ifantis  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-8024-4707>