

Greece's strategic priorities in Southeast Europe and the broader Mediterranean:
The evolution of Greece's foreign policy towards South-Eastern Europe

Course: Security And Stability In South-eastern Europe

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Greek Strategy on Turkey - Overview

- ▶ Principally characterized by periods of tension over disagreements, then usually periods of attempts of resolutions. Such periods tend to change with the decade or even specific government in Greece and Turkey, respectively.
- ▶ In brief, this relationship could be divided in phases:
 - The 1970s with increased tension due to the Cypriot Crisis
 - The 1980s when there were steady attempts for resolution
 - The 1990s when initially talks were going well, then fell out
 - The late 1990s-early 2000s when Turkey's EU candidacy improved relations
 - The mid-2000s-today, with Greco-Turkish relations souring due to the rise of Erdogan and his populist nationalistic irredentist and reversionist policies making diplomacy difficult.
- ▶ Greece has a self-defence stance. Military and diplomatic strategical dogma is maintenance of territory, tackling expansionist desires on her territory. Greek Army simply declares defence of territory West of the line from Western Thrace to the Aegean Islands and Kastellorizo to the de facto border of the Republic of Cyprus (Konstantinos Koliopoulos, 2010).
- ▶ Greece seeks to equalize her military power, or even achieve superiority in crucial fields of a possible Greco-Turkish War (air and sea), to cancel any desire for attack and demonstrate that the only venue for resolving disputes is diplomacy and cooperation.

Main Greco-Turkish Disagreements

▶ Disputes with Greece from the part of Turkey

- Disputing Greece's control on islets on the Greco-Turkish sea borders.
- Demands the demilitarization of the Northern Aegean Islands and the Dodecanese, based on the Treaty of Lausanne (1923), despite the Treaty of Montreaux (1936) repealing these clauses, and the Dodecanese not being part of that treaty.
- Turkey ignores the FIR of Athens and includes parts of Greece's airspace as part of the jurisdiction of the FIR of Istanbul or the FIR of Ankara, ignoring the Chicago Convention of 1944. This makes search and rescue operations much more difficult.
- Turkey refuses to recognize the UN recognized sea borders of Greece through the UNCLOS, which accepts 12 nautical miles of territorial waters for all countries within the UN.
- Turkey promotes the Blue Homeland (Mavi Vatan) expansionistic policy, claiming half the Aegean Sea's EEZ...

▶ Greece's strategical aims concerning Turkey:

- Controlling Immigration Policies
- Disallow Turkey to use Immigration as "Hybrid War"
- Force Turkey to accept conflict resolution through diplomatic channels of the UN, the EU and the NATO
- Cooperate in exploration for energy resources, and for Turkey to accept the Greek EEZ for the sake of the construction of pipelines connecting Greece with the Eastern Mediterranean, boosting her geopolitical position.

Greek Attempts of Resolution with Turkey

- ▶ **Greece receives Turkey's threats, so they are in a state of a major security concern. Overall, Greece top priority is to balance power with Turkey, militarily or diplomatically.**
- ▶ **Greece mostly tries to outmaneuver Turkey through diplomacy within the EU and the NATO, basically to keep the country isolated and recognized as hostile.**
- ▶ **In the last 50 years, relationship has varied:**
 - **In the 1980s-1990s Greece was principally engaged in containment and dialogue.**
 - **Despite the crisis of 1996 with Imia, talks continued, and were better than ever in the Helsinki Summit of 1999, with Turkey committing to join the EU and thus solve all issues with Greece by 2004.**
 - **Yet this proved fruitless as Erdogan's rise through nationalistic populism would draw Turkey away from the EU in the 2000s, and in the 2010s Turkey would become increasingly hostile with a Greece emerging through the Greek Economic Crisis. In the early 2020s Turkey was very bellicose against Greece, forcing Greece to invest billions in the military, to be the highest spending (in GDP %) NATO country, and sign defense alliance with France in 2021.**

Greece's Strategy on Balkan Neighbours

- ▶ Ever-changing in the last 30+ years since 1991.
- ▶ Before there was no communication or interaction, no real relations.
- ▶ After the collapse of Communism, Greece is in an advanced geopolitical and geostrategic position, serving as a bridge between the Balkans and the rest of the world.
- ▶ Greece's chief aims in the Balkans overall were:
 1. Ensuring maintenance of stability
 2. Increasing Greece's diplomatic leverage
 3. Promoting Greece's economic interests
 4. Promoting Greece's national interests (e.g. Albania with minority, NM with name issue)
 5. Counter-balance / prevent any expansion of Turkish influence in the Balkans, principally due to fears of encirclement or even of Neo-Ottomanism.

Greece's Advances to Expand Influence

- ▶ **Different periods of Greco-Balkan interactions:**
 - In 1991-1995, Greece was initially hesitant, and treated the Balkans as an unknown frontier
 - In 1995-2004, Greece was now actively taking part in regional politics, trying to ensure beneficial alliances, and establish a significant diplomatic presence, presenting herself to the West and world as a stabilizing regional power.
 - In 2004-2008, Greece was increasingly facing more internal issues, and was distancing herself from the Balkans, due to lack of understanding and due to the turmoil in the aftermath of the Yugoslav Wars.
 - In 2008 and onward Greece was stuck in a 10 year-long financial crisis, and thus would now be mostly looking internally to fix issues, rather than attempt to ameliorate the situation in adjacent Balkan countries
- ▶ **Greece's strategy to expand through financial means, to increase dependency of Balkan countries on her, thus greater international leverage.**
- ▶ **This was done through establishing transportation infrastructure, investment on energy, telecommunication infrastructure, even Greek enterprises trying to include these new markets. This was however reverted due to the 2008-2019 Greek Financial Crisis, when Greece was almost bankrupt and her GDP plummeted.**

Greece's Influence Expansion through NATO & the European Union

- ▶ Errors from the part of Greece in the 1990s due to internal turmoil from political scandals and tensions, lack of understanding of the situation. Greece had no cohesive strategy.
- ▶ Mistakes of Greece to support Serbia in the Yugoslav Wars due to historical ties, rather than just refusing to participate in the sanctions and bombing raids.
- ▶ Greece was generally mostly concerned with its neighbouring countries, especially with Albania over the Greeks of Southern Albania, and FYROM over the naming dispute.
- ▶ Through the 2000s Greece has restructured its stance through political realism. She prefers to simply align with the EU and the NATO and through them to promote her own interests. Greece is gravely concerned over the case of a widespread Balkan War which might force her to participate. Pushes for peace and Europeanization in Western Balkans.
- ▶ Greece promotes herself as the corridor through which EU and NATO influence is entering the Balkans (e.g. Greek Air Forces now patrols airspace of Montenegro, Albania, North Macedonia and Bulgaria).

Greece's Strategy with Bulgaria

- ▶ **Guiding Bulgarian into the EU and after its entry deeper into Europeanization, focusing on the values of liberalization, corruption reduction and democratization**
- ▶ **Bilateral strategic cooperation, preventing Turkey's spread of influence in the Balkans, which concerns Bulgaria as well due to their having a large Turkish minority in the country, which could be a target of Erdogan's Neo-Ottomanism.**
- ▶ **Construction of pipeline corridor with Turkey, if they are cooperating, to transport gas from Armenia / Azerbaijan to the Balkans and from there to Western Europe via Italy
→ result is bypassing Russia in energy for Europe, lower Russia's influence in Balkans**
- ▶ **Cooperation in energy and trade transportation, especially with pipelines connecting the Black Sea and the Aegean Sea, bypassing the Turkish Straits, increasing their own geopolitical strength and lessening Turkey's.**
- ▶ **Common immigration strategy and cooperation between Greece and Bulgaria, necessary for Greece as Bulgaria does not have a physical barrier with Turkey at its borders, like Greece has with the Evros River, so migrants might pass to Bulgaria and then Greece through the Rhodope Mountains.**

Greece's Strategy with Albania & North Macedonia

Albania

- ▶ Greece as “guarantor” of Albania’s entry in the EU, spreads political influence in the country. Deeper economical connections
- ▶ Greece wants Albania to recognize the boundary of their Exclusive Economic Zone, as example against Turkey.
- ▶ Seeks to minimize Turkey’s influence in the country among Muslim Albanians
- ▶ Aims to reduce irredentism against Greece, aims to protect political rights of the Greeks in Southern Albania

North Macedonia

- ▶ Similar situation with Albania.
- ▶ Greece also concerned over Macedonian Muslim and Albanian Muslims as means for Turkey to spread influence in the Balkans around Greece.
- ▶ Greece seeks to promote NM in the NATO and EU as well, as their existence is crucial for Greece’s interests
 - ▶ NM’s integrity means a possible Albanian-Bulgarian alliance would be divided in fronts (denial of horizontal strategic escalation).
 - ▶ This is what happened to Greece in Spring 1941 when the Axis invaded and overwhelmed Greece by attacking through the entirety of Greece’s northern borders.

Greece's Strategy with the Levant

Lebanon

- ▶ Greece seeks stability in the region, expresses desires for Lebanon not to collapse like Syria, which would cause more refugee waves towards Greece.
- ▶ Greece has expressed desires for further ties with the country, especially due to the existence of Orthodox Christians and even Rum (Greek Orthodox) through the Patriarchate of Antioch (+ desire to keep away Russian influence).
- ▶ Desire for cooperation in EEZ agreements and in the establishment of the EastMed gaz pipeline, along with Israel, verifying Greece's territory over Turkey's claims.

Israel

- ▶ Military cooperation with Israel against Turkey's expansionism in the Eastern Mediterranean.
- ▶ Exploits the souring of Turkish-Israeli relations due to Turkey's increased support of Palestinians, which stems from Erdogan's Pro-Islamic politics
- ▶ Cooperation in the exploration and exploitation in the Eastern Mediterranean, over the gas and oil fields discovered.
- ▶ Cooperation for the EastMed pipeline, along with Lebanon, in order to create a de facto situation where Turkey's claims are ignored.

Greece's Strategy with the Eastern Mediterranean African Countries

- ▶ Mostly concerns Egypt and Libya
- ▶ Greece seeks to cooperate in the exploration and exploitation of energy resources South of Crete.
- ▶ Greece seeks to cancel the 2019 Turkey-Libyan maritime memorandum that ignores Greece's territorial waters
- ▶ Greece signed 2020 maritime deal with Egypt, agreeing on EEZ boundary, ignoring that agreed by Turkey-Libya
- ▶ Plus, cooperation over immigration issues, as both countries are pathways

