

**The European Union and
Eastern Mediterranean after Helsinki
CYPRUS - GREECE - TURKEY
From the Helsinki Summit to the Nice Summit**

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Ever since the decision at the Helsinki meeting of the European Council (December 10-11, 1999) to admit the principle of Turkey's candidacy for membership in the European Union, the Greece-Turkey-EU triangle has simmered with expectation. Yet it is Turkey that finds itself at a crossroads historically and at a difficult time in its history. With hopes of meeting EU requirements, Turkey either democratizes its régime; i.e., creation of a judicial state that respects human rights and normalized relationships with its neighbours, notably Greece and Cyprus or the Turkish state retains its current régime and carries out a neo-Ottoman¹ policy with the inherent consequences on the country's own future and the stability of the region.

The dynamics created after Helsinki have forced the EU to follow Turkey's internal developments closely, including Turkish policy on Greece and Cyprus. The debate over Turkey's European vocation among EU members is still open and watchfully observed by the Americans who want to anchor Turkey to Europe at all costs. However change comes slowly in Turkey where decision-making infrastructures involve the military who do not want to dismantle the authority which they already exercise. Indeed, the balance of power between the Kemalist establishment, the Islamists and the pro-European élite is not clear.

Given this context, Turkey's European future remains uncertain, as does the development of Greek-Turkish relations.

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In the previous issue of *Études helléniques/Hellenic Studies*, we adumbrated the problems stemming from the European dynamic created after Helsinki. We continue our reflection herein with a series of articles that seek to shed light on the new situation and the stakes involved.

The Ecumenical Patriarch, Bartholomew, is not only favourable towards Turkey's European vocation but wants Cyprus' EU candidacy to promote a peaceful solution to the Cyprus issue. The Patriarch hopes for a lasting improvement in Greco-Turkish relations which would be in the best interests of both countries.

Jean Catsiapis considers the issue of EU enlargement to include Cyprus and Turkey as it evolved during the year 2000. He observes how the Cypriot candidacy progressed satisfactorily whereas the Turkish candidacy experienced problems thus slowing down the process. Since Helsinki, Cyprus has closed 17 out of 29 files on the *aquis communautaire*. The author believes that Cyprus must logically be part of the group of states which at the end of 2002 will have finished membership negotiations and could join the EU in 2003, given that the political issue, e.g. no solution to the Cyprus question, cannot block the acceptance of the island's candidacy. On the other hand, Turkey is dragging its feet because of structural and political problems encountered in terms of human rights issues and the democratization process. The serious political, economic and financial crises that rocked Turkey in 2000 and early 2001 will seemingly delay the country's chances of belonging to the European community.

Samim Akgönül examines the experience of both the Turkish-speaking Muslim minorities in Greece and the Greek minority in Turkey. The Greek minority of 110,000 in Turkey (1923), has decreased to today's 3,000 souls with the majority having left after the violent events of September 1955. However the Turkish-speaking Muslim community of 120,000 in Greece has remained stable. Samim Akgonul stresses that their fate is rather precarious since it depends essentially on relations between Athens and Ankara. The current détente tends to comfort Greeks living in Turkey, the 'endangered species', so to speak. The author thinks that reopening the theological

school of Halki, closed in 1978 by Turkey, would be a goodwill gesture that might correspond somewhat to the 'advances' which already benefit the Turkish-speaking minority in Greece.

Dimitris Droutsas and Panayotis Tsakonas analyze Turkey's difficult relations with the European Union from the signing of the association agreement in 1963 up to the post-Helsinki period. The authors discuss Greek-Turkish relations right after the Cold War and the impact of the Cyprus issue on Turkey's European vocation. They stress the 'accession partnership' and the National Program concerning EU *acquis*. Droutsas and Tsakonas conclude that Turkey's choices are not limited with regard to Cyprus as well as Turkish-Greek relations, given that Turkey's progress towards European Union membership hinges on the solutions to these problems. Turkey must either abandon its intransigent policy in these areas and work to solve these problems or it must adopt a policy that overturns the European rules imposed by the 'accession partnership'. According to the authors, Greece must also be aware of the risks associated with this transitional period and must draft strategies with the EU in an effort to attack the problems that Turkey faces. Turkey must also be aware that it will gain Greek support in its European vocation if it adopts a constructive position in terms of bilateral relations and the Cyprus issue.

Fotini Bellou thinks that improved Greco-Turkish relations have reinforced the strategic position of both countries. Indeed, Greece's decision to not block Turkey's candidacy at Helsinki served Greek and Turkish interests and also promoted EU security objectives. Hence she suggests that relations as well as the degree of *rapprochement* between the two countries may be considered to be in a new context, one of European security. Bellou observes that the different priorities of the two neighbours in terms of Turkey's candidacy may affect the current peace process.

Aristote Tziampiris' article treats the Cyprus issue. He describes the positive effects that the Helsinki summit had on the Cypriot European Union membership bid. The author suggests that this may be the first time since 1974 that time is on the Greeks' side. In fact he believes that this positive development is due to the fact that

Helsinki almost guarantees eventual Cypriot membership and that belonging to the EU will serve as a catalyst in the search for a solution, even at the eleventh hour. He thus concludes that Helsinki likely represents the end of the Cyprus problem.

Kosta Gouliamos outlines a new framework based on the geopolitical role Cyprus plays in the Mediterranean. He stresses that Greece risks losing all influence in the Eastern Mediterranean at the expense of its own security.

Overall, the triangle of Greece, Turkey and the European Union is active in trying to bury the problems of the last fifty years. On the Greek side, a heavy wager has been placed on Turkey's European vocation. Revisionism in Greek foreign policy matters, as practised in recent years, has been reinforced since the Helsinki 1999 summit. Criticised by those who fear that Greece is moving ahead on this track with nothing in return from Turkey, this policy represents the position of the Prime minister Costas Simitis and his foreign affairs minister, George Papandreou who believe this as the only way that will break Turkey out of its isolation and will advance the Cypriot EU membership position. Those who feel that this policy has generated no positive results in terms of the Cyprus issue or the Aegean Sea dispute consider the wager a risky one. On the other hand, despite the Greek policy of opening up, Turkey has not moved one iota in its aggressive position toward Cyprus and has not evolved in terms of its claims in the Aegean, which the Greeks consider completely inadmissible.

On the Turkish side, democratization remains stalled and there is considerable resistance to change, as seen in the National Program on *acquis* which the European Union set up as part of the 'accession partnership'. It is therefore quite apparent that Turkey's European vocation is maintained by major internal forces, first and foremost, the military establishment that does not want to lose its influence and control over the party in power. In this respect, these forces correspond to hostile public opinion and major political forces among EU countries. Even most of the European political forces in favour of Turkey's membership consider the country's fate within a 'tiered' European Union in a far-off future. Overall this means that Turkey

could be integrated on the European periphery with a status allowing it most of the advantages of member-countries but without the possibility of free circulation of its citizens within the European 'sanctuary'. The Turkish army, with all its privileges, would also support this type of European status for Turkey in order to protect the military's interests and controlling grasp on the country's political life.

As we wrote in the previous issue of *Étude helléniques/Hellenic Studies*, it is within this context that the neo-Ottoman scenario of a Turkey halfway between Europe and the current state unfolds. In the neo-Ottoman model, democratization would be limited and would not cause the dismantling of the current regime; i.e., the army's powerful political role. Turkey would be linked to Europe through a special status agreement without, however, benefitting from direct access to the European club. The neo-Ottoman model would take into account European positions, American interests and the interests of the bloc in power in Turkey.

For a few years now, a historical compromise among representatives of the Kemalist political and socio-economic forces, the pro-European and the Islamist forces has been taking shape inside Turkey. This compromise would effectively ensure the survival of the neo-Ottoman model.

Nevertheless, the neo-Ottoman model, favourable to this expansionist policy while still enabling Turkey to play a hegemonic role in the region, does not allow for any resolution of the Greco-Turkish contentions nor for any equitable solution to the Cyprus problem. This model, if it continues to be applied, will operate at the expense of Turkey's democratization and respect of human rights. Obviously this scenario would not serve the interests of the Turkish people or the stability of the region. Only extensive democratization, along with solutions to Turkish-Greek disputes, would enable Turkey to consider its European future seriously.

NOTES

1. For more details on the neo-Ottoman policy, see: Stephanos Constantinides and Jean Catsiapis, "The European Union and Eastern Mediterranean after Helsinki" in *Études helléniques/Hellenic Studies*, vol. 8, no 2, Autumn 2000.