

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

Stephanos Constantinides**

Jean Catsiapis***

At the Helsinki Summit (December 10-11, 1999), the Europe of Fifteen bowed to Washington's pressure by reversing the Luxembourg decision of 1997 and accepting Turkey's candidacy for EU membership. Before Helsinki, no candidacy had ever generated the number of problems and debates that Turkey's did. In fact never before had a country with a democratic deficit and a human rights record as poor as Turkey's knocked upon Europe's door. In the past, all states with a history of an authoritarian political régime had to adopt democratic political institutions before applying for EU membership. As did Greece when it drafted its membership application on June 12, 1975, after the fall of the dictatorship in July 1974. All this took place three days after the new Greek republic had passed a constitution comparable to the basic laws of the other EU-member states.

In Turkey's case, one year after Helsinki, the Commission in Brussels was obliged to submit to the candidate a 'partnership for membership' outlining the need for constitutional reform, various obligations, e.g. resolving the Kurdish problem and terminating the occupation of Northern Cyprus.

Given history and these circumstances, one can understand why the Americans felt obliged to pressure the Europeans into accepting the principle of Turkey's candidacy. Of course Turkey's EU membership is strategically important to the United States. Washington wants to anchor Ankara to Europe so as to avoid any European defensive that

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** Université du Québec à Montréal

*** Université de Paris X

is not "exactly coextensive and subordinated to NATO".¹ The United States considers NATO of capital importance as a means of defending its interests not only in Europe but even in Central Asia. The American concern that Turkey be accepted² was understood by US allies who believe that this country provides a key market, an outlet for their economies.

However, from the European vantage point, enlarging the Union implies high stakes. How far can enlargement go without major problems in terms of Europe's institutions and even its 'soul' ? After all, the goal of the 'founding fathers' was not to create a new international structure or military alliance. They sought rather to establish a unique entity with its own identity.

Turkey, from a European perspective, poses many problems. For example, if Europe opens up to Turkey, what can be done with countries like Russia and states in Caucasia, Central Asia or the Middle East? How can these culturally different nations and peoples be integrated? Obviously under the American influence, the risk becomes one of heading too far in a universalist enlargement "to the detriment of the shared references and culture that shaped the initial vision of Europe."³ Furthermore, rather than make Europe a strong political entity, this universalist direction would lead to a free trade zone with a UN-type structure. Obviously such a situation would meet the American need for an Atlantic Europe, scarcely differentiated from NATO, and, of course, well within the American fold.

In addition the reaction to Turkey's European vocation hides Western prejudices as well as fears of Islam and the possible inundation of Turks immigrating to Europe. Most European leaders, regardless of their political stripe, secretly hope that Turkey will be unable to meet the criteria set in Copenhagen and that, in the long run, Turkey will participate in 'reinforced cooperation' with the European 'club'. This line of thinking corresponds to an eventual Europe of concentric circles, a Europe surrounded by buffer states.⁴ Perhaps Turkey's participation as a buffer within one of these peripherals of the European Union might just do the trick. In other words, a two- or multi-tiered

Europe would solve the dilemma of the Turkish presence within the European Union.

However one must go beyond European reservations and also consider Turkish apprehensions. Here Eric Rouleau points out that Turkish political parties have not mentioned that Turkish membership had ever been rejected for political or economic reasons. Instead, certain parties told the Turkish people that the EU simply did not want Muslims. As Rouleau said, “ Turkish politicians have hidden the real reasons behind EU opposition to Turkey because they knew that the conditions imposed by Brussels would completely upset the Turkish political system.”

On the other hand, the Turkish army remains the best ally of Europeans who do not want Turkey to become a member of the EU family. The common rhetorical device among Turkish military leaders is to raise the issue of Turkish 'particularity'. This idea only fuels the fire of Europeans who prefer to see Turkey placed in the periphery of a two-tiered Europe. In sum, the issue of Turkey's specificity serves the Turkish military establishment, the Europeans against Turkish membership and even Americans in that their Turkish ally would participate in a European security structure. It will be interesting to see if the pro-European forces in Turkey and the Turkish people will be satisfied with half-solutions in terms of democratization.

In this special thematic issue, we address the problems arising from the European Council decision in Helsinki to add Turkey to the list of candidates. Given time and space restrictions, we put aside the more existential questions surrounding the European Union, to focus on the current situation in light of the conditions which Turkey must meet if it is to start membership negotiations.

These issues deal with Greek-Turkish relations, the Cyprus question, democratization, human rights, and the transformation of the Turkish economy. Given the fact that Greece did not use its veto in Helsinki, Athens expects the European Union to exert influence on Ankara to resolve bilateral disputes.

In the exclusive interview given by Danielle Mitterrand, president of the NGO *Fondation France Libertés*, she stresses the democratization of the Turkish régime. She considers that "the basic principles which inspire a democratic power have been systematically violated and there can no longer be a debate as to whether or not Turkey has its place in Europe. The European Union can only admit Turkey if this country recognizes and respects human rights and individual freedoms, reforms its constitution, recognizes the rights and cultural identity of the Kurdish people, abolishes torture, the death penalty and degrading treatment of human beings, frees political prisoners and accepts political pluralism." On the topic of Cyprus, Mitterrand observes that "the objective must be to reach an end in the Turkish military occupation of Cyprus. And the Cypriot Republic will write its history in the context of its environment".

Eric Rouleau also granted *Études helléniques/Hellenic Studies* an exclusive interview in which he described the Turkish military as the main obstacle to Turkey's entry into the European Union. He believes that the Turkish military leaders project a negative image of their country in persisting with Kemalist ideology as enshrined in the Turkish constitution. In terms of rapprochement, Rouleau remains skeptical. Everything will depend on internal changes within Turkey. He also thinks that it may not be possible for Cyprus to belong to the European Union without any prior solution to the island's long-standing political problems.

Far more optimistic than Eric Rouleau, Mehmet Ali Birand considers rapprochement between Greece and Turkey to be irrevocable. In fact, the key to improved relations between the neighbours is Cyprus itself. In his words, "without a solution to the Cyprus problem, there can be no sustainable peace between Greece and Turkey." He opines that a package deal is needed but not until 2004, the deadline put at The Hague. "The Greeks must be able to say that they have won in the Aegean and, in Cyprus, the Turks must be able to say that they were able to hold onto land. Otherwise, if we try to solve all these problems, one after the other, it will take years and generate more frustration than anything else. Athens and Ankara are playing diplomatic chess right now. Each move is small, but I can say that rapprochement between Greece and Turkey is irrevocable."

Yet on the topic of Turkey's joining the EU, Ali Birand is disappointed by the reaction of those who put religion and culture as an obstacle and think that in the end, if Turkey changes, the country will be accepted as a member of the EU family.

Didier Billion offers us a retrospective on Turkey's foreign policy from the end of WWII up to Helsinki. The author highlights the complexity of implementing Turkey's foreign policy within the current geopolitical environment but rejects analyses that describe the country as blindly pro-American, as fundamentalist or as newly and aggressively nationalistic. For Billion, the underpinnings of Turkish diplomacy lead the country toward the European Union. In this sense, the Helsinki decision to grant Turkey official candidate status acted as a catalyzer in the development of pro-European Turkish policy.

Van Coufoudakis reviews how the Cypriot issue has developed since the Helsinki Summit. In one respect, Helsinki confirmed that Cyprus is on the European track and its candidacy is not necessarily linked to solving the Island's political problems. Meanwhile the United States, with British support and the United Nations as intermediary, began a diplomatic initiative to solve the Cypriot issue. This initiative damaged the UN's credibility and raised the issue of *acquis communautaire* for Cyprus. Coufoudakis believes that the American endeavour not only derailed the Cypriot issue from UN resolutions and European principles but also led it into the most critical situation seen since the Turkish invasion of the island in 1974. In other words, the initiative has put the survival of Cyprus as an independent and sovereign state into jeopardy. Independent of American machinations, the future of Cyprus is in Europe. If Washington does not help find a viable solution to the problem, then there can be not other means than the application of the resolutions of the Security Council and the *acquis communautaire*. Otherwise, Cyprus shall remain the last divided country in Europe.

Gilles Bertrand presents the situation from the perspective of the Turkish Cypriot community. How do the Turkish Cypriots see this latest development, in other words, the European route? He considers the Cypriot question one of the greatest problems Turkey must solve before joining the European Union. The author observes that the

Turkish Cypriot community is not monolithic. Rauf Denktaş, the Turkish Cypriot leader and the nationalistic right wing, oppose Cyprus' EU application. Yet he remains in power thanks to the votes of Turkish settlers and the Turkish army. The opposition, situated more or less in the centre-left, is more favourable to Cyprus' membership and fears the division will endure, should membership without intercommunity agreement take effect.

The Greek-Turkish feud in the Aegean is classified by Samim Akgönül as the most important bilateral problem. He paints a fresco of Greco-Turkish relations dipping back into the nineteenth century. Nevertheless he focuses on the period from the creation of the Turkish republic (1923) up to today. Akgönül points out that neither the Greeks nor the Turks know their neighbours, despite the fact that until the nineteenth century their lifestyles were closely intertwined. Akgönül concludes by stating that the two main conflicts dividing Greece and Turkey are the Cyprus problem and Aegean territorial issue. On both counts, there have been no changes in positions or objectives as declared by both sides. The author, however, suggests that there has been considerable improvement in Greek-Turkish relations since Helsinki.

Panayiotis Tsakonas and Dimitri Conostas present a full overview of the difficult relations between Ankara and Brussels since the signing of the association agreement in 1963 right up to the Helsinki Summit of last year. This article considers the conditions imposed upon Turkey at the Helsinki Summit and the impact that they may have on Turkey's domestic politics and international relations, especially the Greco-Turkish ones. Although the idea of political aid to Turkey as part of democratization makes sense, the authors also highlight the inherent risks for Greece while this difficult transition takes place. Will the figurative bridge built when Greece did not use its veto and when the European Council announced its decision stand or crumble under the weight of those risks? This remains to be seen in the upcoming months and years.

Kostas Ifantis looks at how the challenges inherent in the transformation of the international system, seen in the 1990s, affect the tri-

angle USA-Greece-Turkey. After an analysis of the context in which the interests of these three evolve, the author points out the three main factors which impose interactive behaviour within that triangle. The factors are the USA's broad strategic interests, regional problems and national uncertainties. Ifantis underlines the fact that despite some optimism at the dawn of a new century, Greek-Turkish relations remain uncertain. The Aegean situation and Cypriot question still simmer and may boil over into crises, thus obliging the United States, as well as Europe, to apply preventive policies. According to the author, the new shift in the situation since the Cold War (despite Helsinki) is the uncertainty weighing on Turkish domestic and foreign policy. Added to that is the question of how well USA would manage to prevent any new crisis from erupting in Greek-Turkish relations.

Burcu Gültekin reports on the reactions to the Helsinki Summit expressed by the Turkish political parties and the population in general. Although the decision was greeted with some enthusiasm in popular opinion polls, the political parties were initially far more reserved given their fear of the severe conditions laid down for the democratization process. Obviously these conditions affected national pride and could allow Greece to air its ideas. In fact on this last point, in Greece, a percentage of the public opinion, the opposition parties and several commentators saw the Helsinki decision as a Turkish victory extracted at the expense of Greek national interests. In any event, the European battle is part of the Turkish political scene where pro-European and anti-European parties joust. The battle is played out in the media, where the stakes are analyzed, and even within the civil society which is generally favourable to Turkey's European course. Gültekin does warn, however, against disproportionate optimism for the pro-European position seen in the Turkish popular opinion. He notes that suspicion rises once any matter regarding the country's territorial integrity is raised.

Over the past few years, in Greece, a certain revisionism in foreign policy has been observed. Unlike the general impression, especially the one given abroad, this revisionism did not begin with the arrival of George Papandreou as foreign affairs minister. It started much earlier

and may be observed in the foreign policies of the last years of Andreas Papandreou's era. Only after the death of A. Papandreaou and the arrival of Costas Simitis, was a new foreign policy put forth, with its main characteristics as rapprochement with EU partners, end of Greece's use of a veto against Turkey's candidacy in the EU, positive attitude toward relations with that country and its European partners, Americans, NATO allies, and finally, rapprochement with Turkey. Perhaps another addition would be a more 'positive' Balkan policy.

This revisionism has extended to most of Greek political life but it did not come out of the blue from nowhere. For years Greece has had a school of thought in which many politicians, reporters, businessmen, academics and intellectuals are against what they consider dead-end nationalism. They preach the end of the 'heroic' era of anti-Americanism and anti-Western feelings left over from the anti-junta movement, obscurantism and repeated foreign intervention in domestic matters for over a century.

This revisionism may be seen outside politics in areas like education, where history textbooks are gradually being revised, as well as in the intellectual milieu. Long considered a weapon in the Greek people's struggle for freedom, progressive nationalism tainted with Marxism in certain periods, is currently relegated to limbo by a bloc of people surrounding Costas Simitis. Intellectuals who have criticized the last years of Andreas Papandreou's vision not only in foreign affairs but overall now form the prime minister's team of close advisors.

This new, so-called modernist, political trend is trying to effect major changes in Greek society so that the country will escape a certain social, political and economic 'underdevelopment'. Even if everyone agrees on the general principles of this 'modernization' policy, there is bitter criticism of how it is implemented. Especially criticized is the modernization attempt which is considered 'neo-liberalist'.

In foreign policy, the critics feel that Greece has abandoned its traditional positions in favour of rapprochement with Turkey without the slightest concession on Turkey's part, be it the Aegean dispute or the Cyprus question.⁵

The triangle, Greece-Turkey-USA, remains in turmoil, but Turkey is the country standing at the crossroads and experiencing a critical period in its history. Turkey may either choose to democratize, respect human rights and normalize relations with its neighbours (Greece and Cyprus) with the hope of joining the European Union or it may maintain the *status quo* and lead a neo-Ottoman régime assuming all the inherent consequences that this choice will have on its future and on stability in the region.

Pro-European Turkish political forces, economic and intellectual élites and the civil society in general support the first scenario of democratization. Nationalist political forces, the army and certain Islamic groups support the second scenario of maintaining the current régime and continuing a neo-Ottoman international policy,⁶ supposedly drawing upon Kemalism. The position of the Islamic movement remains rather ambiguous but we could say that the greater majority does not oppose Turkey's essentially European future. The Islamic party leader Necmettin Erbakan has actually been quite clear on this issue.⁷

Turkey's European track meets an essentially hostile European opinion. Even European political forces favouring Turkey's entry into the European Union tend to place that event in a faroff future and within the context of a two-tiered (or even several tiered) Europe. In other words, Turkey is viewed as part of the periphery, with a status that would grant it most of the advantages of member countries but without the possibility of free circulation of people within the European 'sanctuary'. The Turkish army with all its privileges would also favour this type of status for Turkey in that it would not affect the army's interests and control over the country's political life.

Within the context outlined above we also find the neo-Ottoman scenario of a Turkey halfway between Europe and the country's current situation. This model would also take into account: 1) that democratization would be limited and would not lead to dismantling the current régime and abolishing the political role of the army; 2) that Turkey would be linked to Europe through a particular status

without, however, having direct access to a select European club. The neo-Ottoman model would take into account European perspectives, the interests of the United States, as well as those of the bloc in power in Turkey.

For a few years now a historic compromise has been forming among members of the various political and social forces in Turkey (Kemalists, Pro-Europeans, Islamists). This compromise would help ensure the survival of the neo-Ottoman model.

Nevertheless, the neo-Ottoman model, which is expansionist in nature and still allows Turkey to play a hegemonic role in the region, would not lead to a resolution of the Greek-Turkish dispute nor to an equitable solution to the Cyprus problem. This model would undoubtedly operate at the expense of the democratization of Turkish society and to the detriment of human rights. Obviously this scenario would not serve the interests of the Turkish people nor improve regional stability.

NOTES

1. Georges-Henri Soutou, « Civilisation, histoire et géopolitique : La problématique de l'entrée de la Turquie dans l'Union européenne », in **Geopolitique**, no 69, avril 2000, p. 30.
2. For more on this topic, see Henry Kissinger, **Diplomacy**, New York, Simon Schuster, 1994, p. 813 and Zbigniew Brzezinski, **Le grand échiquier**, Paris, Boyard, 1997, p. 24.
3. Interview with president Valéry Giscard D'Estaing, in **Geopolitique**, op. cit., p. 7.
4. Jean-Paul Picaper, « L'Allemagne, tête de pont de la Turquie en Europe », in **Geopolitique**, op. cit., p. 47.
5. Theoretically, the current Greek foreign policy reveals the victory of the transnationalist school (tinted with neoliberalism) at the expense of the realist school which dominated along side the Marxist wave prior to the political and intellectual IR debates in Greece.
6. The concept of a neo-Ottoman policy refers to a compromise in the Kemalist movement and Islamic current that have developed in Turkey over the years.

This concept does not correspond to the real or apparent conflicts perceived outside the country. The proof, as we have seen it for years now, is a revitalization of Islam in Turkish society. The Kemal forces, with the army in front, accept this reality while trying to temper the repeated interventions and consolidating the compromise with the Islamic supporters or fundamentalists. Such policy would enable Turkey to resolve the Kurdish problem, the neo-Ottoman model being more open according to the Ottoman multicultural tradition. It would also enable an expansionist foreign policy and a peripheral hegemonic role. This would also correspond to American interests and, naturally, those of the Turkish military establishment. This model would also allow the Europeans to justify refusing Turkey's access to the select club while linking Turkey to the European periphery within the framework of a 'multi-tiered Europe'. Within this context, the socio-political pro-European movements would have no other choice than to agree to the compromise. In fact this is how they have behaved in the past alongside Kemalists in order to counterbalance the influence of Islamic fundamentalists.

For an introduction to the neo-Ottoman concept, see David Bachard, **Turkey and the West**, Royal Institute of International Affairs, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985, p. 91.

For a more in depth analysis, see Stephanos Constantinides:

- a. "Turkey : The Emergence of a New Foreign Policy, The Neo-Ottoman Imperial Model", **Journal of Political and military sociology**, 1996, vol. 24 (winter) 323-334.
 - b. "Turkish Foreign Policy : The Neo-Ottoman model" in S. Constantinides, Th. Pelagidis, **Hellenism in 21st century**, Athens, Papazissis Publishers (in Greek), p.95-136.
7. Eric Rouleau, "Turkey : Beyond Ataturk", **Foreign Policy**, Summer, 1996, p. 73. See also the interview with the author in this issue of *Études Hellénique / Hellenic Studies*. We point out that Turkish Islamism of Ottoman tradition, is not like that which has been seen in Iran or Algeria.