

## Based on the Archives of the Quai d'Orsay

### 1976 Greek-Turkish Tensions as described to Giscard d'Estaing by Karamanlis

In 1976 Greek-Turkish relations were fraught with tension. Besides the Cypriot issue, which had taken a dramatic turn with the Turkish military intervention in the summer of 1974, the disagreements between Athens and Ankara broadened to include matters in the Aegean and the Turkish-speaking minority in Thrace. In April, Prime Minister Constantine Karamanlis suggested that a pact of non-aggression be signed with Turkey without delay. This pact would require monitoring of arms in both countries. When Demirel, the Turkish Prime Minister, rejected this proposal, the Greek Prime Minister wrote to him once again on May 19. A copy of the document was given to the French President, Valéry Giscard d'Estaing. In this letter, Ankara's aggressive stance is clearly indicated, especially in terms of the Aegean Sea: *«Turkey seeks to reverse unilaterally the status quo which was established 50 years ago in the Aegean Sea by international treaties and has proven up to now entirely adequate»*. In concluding his letter to Demirel, Karamanlis maintains his intention of having good relations with Turkey: *«I wish to assure you that I will always examine with an open mind any reasonable proposal which could lead to an improvement in our relations. My belief in the necessity of a Greco-Turkish entente has been proved in the past»*.

The correspondence (March 20, 30, and May 25, 1976) from Karamanlis to Giscard d'Estaing, including the latter's response of March 31, expresses the reality of the slogan 'Greece-France-Alliance' launched after the fall of the Junta in 1974, and the personal friendship shared by these two politicians. Indeed, the alliance between Greece and France would be the main axis of Greek diplomacy in the mid-1970s. The exchange of letters published herein reveals the climate of confidence which reigned between Karamanlis and Giscard d'Estaing, who supported the Greek policy on Turkey and championed Greece's entry into the European Common Market. All in all, in 1976, Karamanlis used the maximum of diplomatic arms available to defuse a crisis with Ankara.

2006: Thirty years later, Greco-Turkish relations have undergone a major change while remaining conflictual. Back in 1999 'earthquake diplomacy', begun by Foreign Affairs Minister, George Papandreou, certainly did lead to a thaw in relations between Athens and Ankara. Nonetheless, tension between Greece and Turkey has continued to rise while Greek diplomacy has fully supported Turkey's EU candidacy.

And now, we have reached the point where a Greek pilot has died after colliding with a Turkish fighter plane (May 23, 2006). It is well known that there have been at least 30 incidents daily, since 1974, involving fighter planes from both countries within the Aegean airspace. In order to defuse this tension, Athens now finds itself obliged to propose to Ankara a 'red line', a mechanism reminiscent of the Cold War period.

The history of Greek-Turkish relations shows that the phases of rapprochement between the neighbours are always followed by periods of tension or even confrontation. Greek popular opinion is tired of Turkish provocations and now claims to be hostile to Turkish EU membership. This view stems especially from Ankara's refusal to extend to the Cypriot Republic its customs agreement with the EU, despite a declared commitment.

One doubts that the Greek Government will be able to ignore the views of its electorate in the upcoming months.