

TURKEY AND GREECE: AN APPENDIX AND A LETTER

OSMAN OLCAY

Osman Olcay is a retired ambassador and a former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkey.

"Timeo Danaos et dona ferentes" Publius Vergilius Maro (BC 70-19)

For more than half of the forty odd years the author of this article spent in the Turkish foreign service he was dealing with multilateral rather than bilateral relations. He had no direct experience of Greece, its people, its bureaucracy nor its politicians. This does not mean, of course, that as a Turkish career diplomat, he could forever avoid dealing with never-ending Turco-Greek problems. The following paragraphs and pages will amply prove that no Turkish diplomat—nor to that effect any Greek diplomat—can claim immunity from this syndrome.

My personal experiences, which I intend to share, for what they are worth, are often so contradictory that they may well illustrate the basic characteristics of Turco-Greek relations: ambiguity, if not ambivalence!

I first met Greek diplomats professionally during my second posting abroad, when I was a junior member of our Permanent Delegation to NATO, which Turkey and Greece had recently joined together. I had to attend a number of meetings of committees together with my young Greek colleagues. This togetherness which, I am sure, was considered a catastrophe by Greece, was not received as such by Turkey, which hoped that these additional close relationships would dissipate any remnants of suspicion about each other's ill intentions. Turkey, at the time, was still counting with justified pride the laurels her glorious armed forces with great sacrifice, had earned in the Korean War, which we naively believed had definitely anchored us to Europe, to the Western Alliance, to a prosperous future.

The main, if not the only, rivalry noticeable between our two countries was linked to the amount and quality of the aid we directly or through NATO expected to receive to reinforce our respective armed forces or our defence infrastructures. Turkey, as far as I can remember, never publicly complained about percentages applied to some founding member countries who were generously treated, especially as sufferers of World War II and its immediate sequels. Needless to say that, Greece, our fellow newcomer, was not left in the lurch either.

Our honeymoon with our Greek counterparts did not last long. The Cyprus crisis loomed on the horizon. When the United Kingdom (bless her soul) decided in the aftermath of persistent and bloody upheavals on the island to depart for good (while maintaining her sovereignty over two military bases), questions were raised about the future of the island, in the minds of Turks and Turkish Cypriots. Collective remembrance was spurred especially by historic reminiscences of how, step by step, the British intervention in favour of the Ottoman Empire in their war against Russia (1878), led to the formal acquisition of the island as a Crown Colony in 1925. The slow but sure motion, typical of imperial British diplomacy, started when Russia's threat was sanctioned by the Treaty of San Stefano, and Britain and other Western powers met in Berlin and decided to push back Russia as far as possible from the Turkish Straits. The price the Ottoman Empire had to pay was to accept temporarily, the cession of her sovereignty over Cyprus in favour of the British Empire; it being understood that if Russia would renounce her acquisitions in Eastern Anatolia, the British would return the island to Ottoman rule. The First World War's final settlement left Cyprus under British control when Turkey recognised it by virtue of Articles 16 and 20 of the Lausanne Treaty of 1923.

The reason why I took such space and time to explain the origin of Greece's interest in and so-called rights over Cyprus is precisely to indicate that she has practically none, with the exception of the mythical Hellenism which, when uncontrolled, could easily carry Greek emotions to the confines of the Khyber Pass, in the footsteps of Alexander of Macedonia (the name 'Macedonia' being a geographical name which presents yet another current problem linked to the partition of former Yugoslavia).

Let me turn to the protracted efforts at the United Nations to find a viable solution to the post-colonial situation inherited by the two ethnic communities. What finally emerged after years of negotiations, was the creation of a kind of bi-communal state, with a complicated but well-defined constitution, under the guarantee of the two motherlands, ie. Greece and Turkey, who would also have the privilege and duty of being represented by modest military contingents. The 'national' parliament would be elected according to fixed percentages for both ethnic groups, et cetera, et cetera.

The first head of state, His Beatitude Makarios, was also the first to denounce and ignore its constitution. The rest is a long story which ended (after years of great suffering, discrimination, and moral and physical ill-treatment for the Turkish Cypriots) in what is known as the 'Sampson coup d'état'. This triggered a Turkish military intervention, whose ultimate surviving result is the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), totally separated from the southern part of the island, and recognised, alas, only by Turkey.

So far, I have confined myself to a description of what, in effect, are the fringe results of tense Turco-Greek relations. To Cyprus may be added the problems concerning the Aegean Sea and their repercussions on NATO, which I intend to present by unashamedly quoting from a book by a friend of mine, a Dutch colleague from our NATO Council days, who also served his country most brilliantly for six faithful years as ambassador to Athens during what we Turks call the Peace Operation which ultimately brought about the creation of the TRNC. Ambassador Barkman's book¹ will serve as a serious reminder of how the many problems between Turkey and Greece were, and probably still are, seen by Athens.

In an appendix to his book, the author summarised the Greek-Turkish controversies over the Aegean Sea and air spaces. I will quote those paragraphs in full from this appendix, which have led me to respond to my colleague in a letter, the text of which I present here as well.

From: 'Appendix. Aegean Sea and Air Space. A brief description of Greek-Turkish Controversies'

Paragraph 1:

"The geographics (sic) of the Aegean Sea, only little more than 200 miles wide, with Greek islands scattered all over it, some of them very near the Turkish coast, are bound to create problems between the two countries on either shore; and history has not made them any less complex. These problems can only be resolved if there exists a relationship of trust and confidence; they are exacerbated in an atmosphere of distrust and suspicion. Trust can only be based, of course, on the safeguarding of each side's interests in a mutually acceptable way; neither Greece nor Turkey has found this way yet."

Paragraph 4:

"Airspace

Civilian air traffic over the Aegean has to conform, as anywhere else, to arrangements agreed upon in the ICAO [International Civil Aviation Organisation]. In accordance with the agreements of 1952 and 1958, the Flight Information Region (FIR) Athens covers the air space, as far as air traffic control is concerned over Greece and over the Aegean up to Turkish territorial air space."

Paragraph 5:

"This dispute over FIR Athens was a part of a war of nerves that was being waged between the two countries. Coming as it did after Turkey's first military intervention in Cyprus (which took place after the constitutional order had been overthrown by the Sampson coup), the Greeks apparently saw NOTAM 714 [notice to airmen No. 714, issued by Turkey during the Cyprus crisis] as an attempt to obtain air traffic control over the eastern-most Greek islands and as a 'salami tactic' threatening Greek sovereignty over those islands. It is impossible to know whether any of these suspicions were justified, and this applies naturally also to Turkish suspicions. Turkey for her part, apparently

wanted to forestall any Greek attempts to block her freedom of movement in the Aegean sea and air. This no doubt dictated to a large extent her attitude with regards to the continental shelf and territorial waters as well. She is also naturally very sensitive to any Greek claim, however veiled or implied a contrario, that air traffic control zones equal sovereign air space."

Paragraph 6:

"Territorial waters

The Greek territorial waters extend to six nautical miles from the natural coastline. Turkey has a mixed system: in the Black Sea and the Mediterranean, they extend to 12 nautical miles (n.m.), while in the Aegean they are 6 n.m. Since 1964, they are measured by a straight base line system (in that year a 6 n.m. fishing zone was proclaimed by Turkey, extending her economic zone in the Aegean to 12 n.m. but it was abolished in 1982; both the straight base line and the fishing zone has lead to Greek protests)."

Paragraph 7:

"Greece maintains that international law permits her to extend her territorial waters in the Aegean to 12 nautical miles, while respecting the right of innocent passage and allowing for corridors for free navigation in the Aegean. Her position is that she can not waive this sovereign right; nevertheless she has not made use of it yet. This will also depend, it seems, on the dialogue on Greece's other differences with Turkey."

Paragraph 12:

"Command structure

Greece and Turkey acceded to the Alliance in 1952. In December of that year the North Atlantic Council created, directly under SACEUR, the post of C-in-C Mediterranean (CINCMED), also called C-in-C Allied Forces Mediterranean (CINAFMED), who (sic) oversaw the defence of the entire Mediterranean and the Black Sea. Two of the area commands established under CINCMED in 1954 were MEDNOREAST (with Headquarters in Ankara) and MEDEAST (with HQ in Athens); their areas of responsibility were delineated in 1957, with all waters in the Aegean outside Turkish territorial waters coming under MEDEAST, and MEDNOREAST being given responsibility in the Black Sea and within Turkish territorial waters in the Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean."

Ambassador Barkman's Greek-influenced analysis of the still unsolved controversy about the Aegean maritime problems of the time, 1983 to be accurate, before the publication of this book, triggered reactions on my part, which I expressed in a letter to him, as follows:

"As a schoolboy I was taught that the name of the sea between Turkey and Greece was Islands' Sea. I soon discovered that what was lacking in that sea was enough water. As though the title of 'sea' was a usurpation.

"Having reached that conclusion, I still felt—and feel—as you seem to have been lured to do, that all conflicts related to that sea are based on geographic reality. This is a source of many errors: geography not being associated to history. The trump card of our Greek friends is that they always invoke the geo-political situation of the present and the historical reality of the situation before Christ.

"I come now, to a brief analysis of your description of Greco-Turkish controversies:

Paragraph 1: You mention at the very beginning, and rightly so, the question of mutual confidence. I, as a Turk, feel that your text is strongly influenced understandably by Hellenic sources. May I state, at first, that I would not qualify as 'excellent' Andrew Wilson's paper, that I had read some two years ago and found exceedingly biased.

Paragraph 4: All your explanations concerning the air space seem based on an erroneous approach to the problem: Turkey never intended to contest the geographical limits of the Athens FIR zone. The problem arose from a fundamentally wrong conception by Athens, which tends to confound 'responsibility over aerial information zone' with 'air space sovereignty.' Another source of conflict stems from the fact that Greece adds to its six miles of territorial water, another four in the air. Thus adding irrespirability to the Aegean Sea's shortage of free water.

"Paragraph 5: The history of the abrogation by Turkey of NOTAM 714 as a sign of return to normalcy is there to prove that this gesture was not reciprocated with the same good intention. Furthermore, it is difficult to understand despite your explanatory parenthesis, the causes of the Turkish military intervention in Cyprus, unless you go back, at least to 1964, when the United Nations decided to intervene between the 'Greek government of Cyprus' and its 'Turkish citizens' in order to protect the latter.

In the same paragraph, the explanation given for NOTAM 714 is the design of the Turks over the continental shelf. Whereas, the Greek problem is clear cut: since FIR means sovereignty, the whole of the Aegean, including its continental shelves are necessarily Greek.

"Paragraph 6: The following paragraph should once more deal with geographic history, rather than geography in a vacuum and thus go back at least to the Lausanne Treaty of 1923. There we could take note of a curious phenomenon of Greek expansionism: from three miles to six and then from six miles to six plus four miles in the air! All this, with the adoptions of the 12 miles would lead to the total elimination of non-Greek waters in the Islands' Sea of my childhood! Yet another precision need to be taken into consideration: the six miles of the Turkish law enacted in 1964—abolished since 1982—was not referring to an adjoining zone but to a fishery zone, strictu sensu.

"Paragraph 7: Doesn't it look rather odd to you that, in a sea whose shores consist of only two countries, one of them can only enjoy the limited right of innocent passage. (By the way, the world 'innocent' reminds me of the famous 'faux-pas' of French Prime Minister Barre mourning both the Jewish and the 'innocent' victims of a bomb attempt against a synagogue in Paris.) At the risk of being intolerably repetitive, I will revert once more to the theme of the waterless sea, if I may, drawing your attention to the fact that with any further enlargements of Greek territorial waters, the Aegean would be transformed to an internal sovereign Greek sea. May I also remind you that even the Caspian's riparian states enjoy fuller rights. Might not these examples justify our casus belli warning?

"Paragraph 12: Finally, I have the feeling that you deliberately or at least unwittingly omit all the ups and downs which preceded the adoption of the Rogers' Agreement. As to the ensuing present difficulties, it is excusable not to refer to them, since they continue to exist. The present government of Greece, forgetting they owe their return to the fold to the Rogers' Agreement, continue to consider it unacceptable. Has Greece the intention of behaving as a rightful member of NATO?

"Papandreou openly declared that Greece remains in the Alliance only because of Turkey's presence therein.

"Turkey's dilemma is that we Turks do not detest the Greeks as much as they hate us. Their problem is that we exist."

More than ten years after this exchange of letters, the problem has acquired new dimensions. Whereas, the fall of the Berlin Wall and the dramatic developments which took place since have transformed unrecognisably Europe' geographical, political and even population maps, one thing remains unchanged: each generation produces fresh crops of Turcophobes in Greece who seem to be dedicated to causing harm to Turkey. And we have to recognise the fact that they succeed. Nowadays, their hands seem to be strengthened by the kind of trump card that the right of veto offers them in European organisations. We are aware that, through our own errors, we have missed opportunities in the past several decades to harvest the crop of dedicated attachment to European ideals, be it in the defence of peace, economic cooperation, respect for democracy, military

contributions to regional peace-keeping actions in the Middle East, the Balkans, and even in Africa. We went all the way to help establish the rule of law in Iraq and Albania not to mention the newly emerging Turkish speaking countries in the Caucasus and Central Asia. Yet, I still remember, more than three decades ago, the warmth of Paul-Henri Spaak's voice in a moving ceremony in Ankara: "The highest peak of Europe is no more the Mont Blanc, but Mount Ararat."

Gone are also the days when, in search of a durable solution to the Cyprus problem, another historic giant of the European scene drew a line on a map of the island which prophetically almost exactly fitted the present boundaries of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. Does not anyone in either France or Western Europe remember General de Gaulle?

May I, before ending, in the vagarious mood of this article, allow myself another retrospective comment on the attitude of yet another great historic personality, this time a Greek statesman: Eleutherios Venizelos. His whole career was dedicated to the Megalo Idea, the dream of all the ultra-nationalists, imperialists, expansionists of which he was the borne and—for a time—successful leader. After his ultimate defeat at the Lausanne Conference table and the painful exchange of population which ensued, Venizelos became with enthusiasm a supporter of a policy of friendship with Turkey. Just before his death, Venizelos, in a final beau-geste, proposed officially to the Nobel Institute, to award the Peace Prize to Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, his erstwhile nemesis. Those were the days.

The author of this, already too long article, had better recognise that he is getting too old to dispute the encumbering unfairness of the past and the present, and should therefore leave litigation on all these matters to others and gracefully let his own personal curtain drop.

1 Barkman, Carl (1989), *An Ambassador in Athens*, Merlin Press, London, pp. 283-290.