

THE SEARCH OF A *CAUTIOUS RAPPROCHEMENT*? PERSPECTIVES FOR GRECO-TURKISH RELATIONS IN THE CONTEXT OF SYRIZA'S POSITION TOWARDS THE EU

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ÖZET

2008 finansal krizinin Avrupa Birliği'nde, özellikle Birliğin bazı güney üyelerinde son derece önemli etkileri olmuştur. Yunanistan'da finansal krizin etkileri kemer sıkma önlemlerinin de katkısı ile derinleşmiş ve bir politik krize doğru evrilmiştir. Bu sürecin sonunda Ocak 2015'te Syriza Partisi Yunanistan'ı krizden çıkaracak değişimi gerçekleştirme vaadi ile iktidara gelmiştir.

Bu gelişmeler ışığında, çalışmanın ilk bölümünde AB çerçevesi içerisinde Yunanistan'daki borç krizi ve Syriza Partisi'nin zaferi hakkında bir değerlendirme yapılması hedeflenmiştir. İkinci bölümde ise; borç krizi ve Syriza'nın iktidara gelmesi ile başlayan ve Syriza'nın vaatleri ile dikkatleri çeken bu değişim döneminin Türk-Yunan ilişkilerinde uzun süredir çözülmemeyen bazı kemikleşmiş sorunların çözülmesinde ve Türkiye-AB ilişkilerinin ilerlemesinde bir dönüm noktası olarak yer alıp alamayacağı yönünde bir analiz ortaya konulmuştur.

Anahtar kelimeler: Avrupa Birliği, Syriza, borç krizi, Türk-Yunan ilişkileri.

ABSTRACT

The financial crisis of 2008 has had profound effects on the EU, especially on some of its southern members. In Greece, the effects of the financial crisis and the austerity measures put into place to fight this crisis had culminated in a political crisis. Consequently, Syriza has come to power with various promises to take Greece out of this crisis.

In the light of these developments, in the first part of this paper, the aim is to evaluate the Greek debt crisis and the Syriza victory within the framework of the EU. Then, in the second part, the paper aims to investigate whether this specific time period can be used as a turning point in Greco-

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Turkish relations to solve the long standing and unresolved problems between the two countries as well as improving the EU-Turkish relations.

Key words: European Union, debt crisis, Syriza, Greco-Turkish relations.

1. INTRODUCTION

The financial crisis which started in the United States in 2007 has reached the European Union (EU) in 2008. When the EU was hit by this crisis, hot discussions were underway for the last couple of years concerning the future of the EU. The EU has already become a monetary union by 2001, however, unity of fiscal policies were not achieved yet. This lack of fiscal discipline at the EU level coupled with uncontrolled neoliberal policies adopted by many EU members have started to pose serious threats on the economies of some members, especially the Southern ones. The financial crisis has exacerbated this situation.

It goes without saying that among these countries, the most detrimental effects have been on the Greek economy and citizens. In Greece, financial crisis has led to a dramatic increase in foreign debt and unemployment. The Greek Government's efforts to finance this debt have created an immense pressure on the Greek citizens transforming the crisis to a political one.

The EU, although lacking established institutions to manage such a crisis, has tried to support Greece with more credits as well as extensions. However, these efforts have not been successful. At the beginning of 2015, the Greek people have, finally, brought Syriza to power with their demands for change. At this juncture, it is possible to highlight the need for change both on the side of Greece as well as the EU. Greece needs to solve its financial and economic problems and pay back its debts with the aim of strengthening its economy and restoring its prestige in the region. The EU needs to revive integration and be able to take the most out of it to make the EU an area of peace, prosperity and success. In this respect, in the first part of this paper, it will be argued that if change can be achieved both in Greece and in the EU together, it might be possible to reach a win-win solution to the problems being faced by both sides.

Accordingly, this paper tries to argue that although some reasons of the Greek crisis are related to the incapable institutions and financial management of the EU, the EU still constitutes an important part of the solution

for Greece. Respectively, a successful management of the Greek crisis is an important necessity as well as motivator for the continuity of the European integration project.

In a nut shell, the paper will first argue that rather than disintegration at any level, enhanced cooperation at the EU level with the establishment of capable institutions and control mechanisms would bring about the optimum solutions to the existing problems on both sides.

Based on this perspective, the second part of the paper will center around the effects of Syriza's coming to power on Greco-Turkish relations. After analysing Syriza's perceptions of Greco-Turkish relations and touching upon some of the long standing disputes between Turkey and Greece, this possible period of change in Greece and the EU will be highlighted as a turning point in Greco-Turkish relations as well as the EU-Turkish relations constituting a historical opportunity to overcome existing problems to the benefit of all. In the light of this argument which places the EU as an indispensable framework for Greco-Turkish relations, possible cooperation frameworks among the three parties will be suggested.

2. An Evaluation of the Greek Debt Crisis and the Syriza Victory within the Framework of the European Union

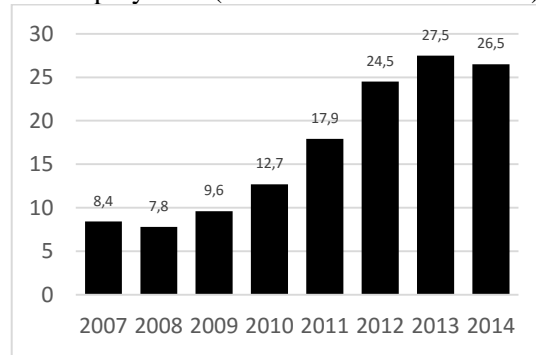
Greece; geographically placed on the southern borders of the European continent and close to the geopolitically important regions such as the Middle East, North Africa and the Balkans has always been included in European plans. Although Greece is a small country with a limited economic strength, politically and ideologically, it has always supported Europe, especially during the Cold War period against communism. It has become a member of the European Union (EU) in 1981 and a member of the Eurozone in 2001 following its fulfilment of the Maastricht Convergence Criteria.

a. Background of the financial crisis in the EU and Greece

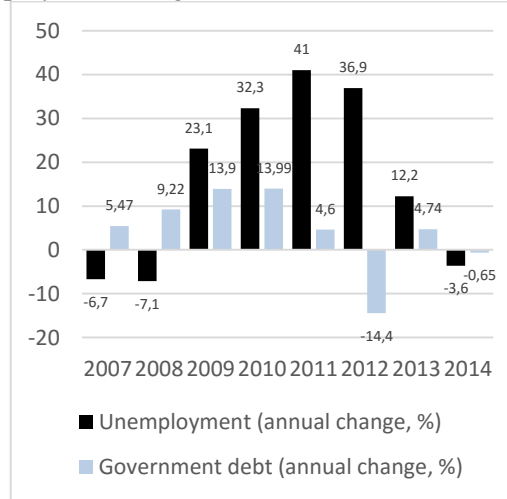
In the EU, establishment of the Eurozone has represented an important leap forward towards becoming an economic and monetary union. While the single currency; Euro, and the European Central Bank which has been established to manage monetary policy and coordinate macroeconomic policies have constituted the necessary steps of a monetary union, achieving the coordination of economic policies have not been possible. Besides, the Stability and Growth Pact which has been established as the preventive and

corrective arm of the monetary union in terms of controlling budgetary discipline in the Eurozone has not been able to work efficiently. Just before the global financial crisis started, in the EU, there was institutional asymmetry; the EU was a monetary union but it was not a fiscal union yet. Therefore, before the financial crisis, the EU already had inadequate financial institutions which were creating problems.

Figure 1: Unemployment and government debt in Greece
Unemployment (% of the total labour force)



Unemployment and government debt (annual change, %)



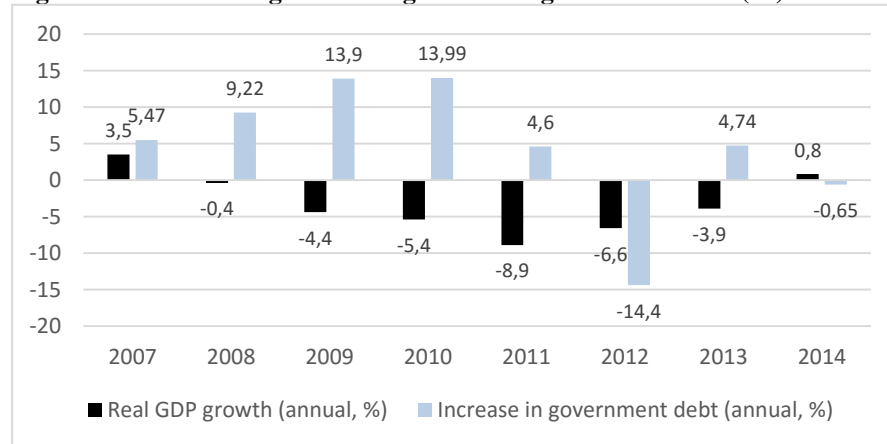
Source: Eurostat

When the financial crisis reached the EU, it quickly evolved into a debt crisis especially on the southern borders of the EU. The EU came up with the bailout programs and austerity measures to fight the crisis. Since

there was no capable institution in the Euro area to deal with countries which experience financial and economic difficulties, debt problems have been managed by the Troika which consisted of the European Commission, the IMF and the European Central Bank (Gros, 2015). In the case of Greece, the measures demanded by the Troika have unfortunately steamed up the debt problem, created an economic recession, led to increasing unemployment rates as evidenced (figures 1 and 2) below. All these developments caused a decrease of national wealth and transformed the debt crisis first to an economic crisis. In 2010, as a result of the reaction coming from the public, a political crisis ensued (Tayfur, 2015: 66).

The figure above shows the alarming rates of unemployment in Greece since 2008. It also illustrates that the increase in the governmental debt in the post-2008 period is accompanied by a non-proportional increase in the percentage of the unemployed. In addition, it seems important to underline that Greece had the highest unemployment rate in Europe for the year 2014. What makes this picture even worse is that 73,5% of the unemployed in this country in 2014 had been jobless for more than a year against 67,1 in 2013 (Eurostat, 2015). The OECD projections for the year 2015 are also dire: They suggest that jobless people will constitute an approximate 27% of the active population (OECD, 2014).

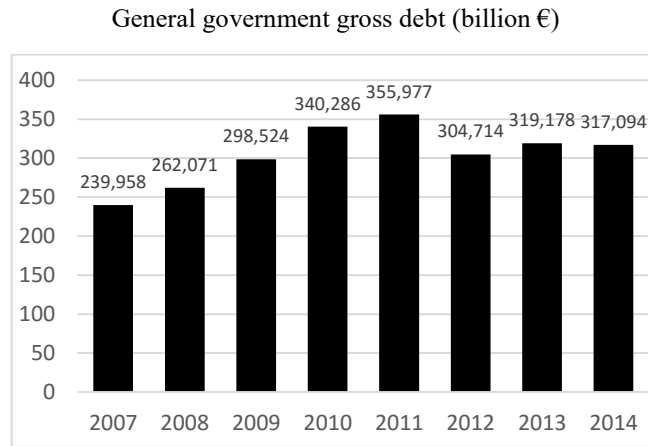
Figure 2: Annual changes in GDP growth and government debt (%)



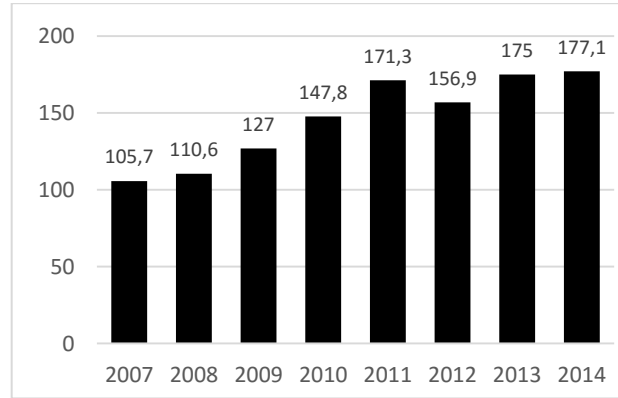
Source: OECD and Eurostat

Another point that must be highlighted concerns the end of the economic downturn. Figure 2 stipulates that, after six years of recession, Greek economy finally grew in 2014. The same year, a slight decrease in the general government gross debt was observed as well. Nonetheless, as shown by the Figure 3, the ratio of the Greek government's debt to the GDP is in a quasi-constant increase for the period 2007-2014. The year 2012 is the only exception where the percentage of the debt in the GDP points to a slower increase vis-à-vis the previous year. Yet, even in that period, the Greek government's debt is more than 1,5 times bigger than the size of the economy. Besides, it beats a new record in 2013 and a higher level of debt is witnessed again the next year. These trends are particularly meaningful when they are taken into consideration simultaneously with the data provided by the Figure 2. Between 2008 and 2013, The Greek GDP has shrunk every year while the government has remained highly in debt. The figures clearly show that starting with 2008 as government debt increases, GDP has declined and unemployment has increased. This shows that the funds acquired through debt have not been used inclusively and productively to the advantage of the Greek economy.

Figure 3: General government gross debt and government-debt-to-GDP Ratio in Greece



Central government debt (% of GDP)



Source: OECD (period 2007-2010) and Eurostat (period 2011-2014)

b. The Change Promised by Syriza

The existing Greek party politics and the EU policies to help Greece have not been successful to take Greece out of a humanitarian crisis where people have started to suffer economically. The EU's efforts to help Greece through reforms and austerity have ended up with dramatic outcomes on the side of the Greek citizens. Besides EU's failure, the Greek Government has also not been able to save the Greek citizens from the dramatic outcomes of this crisis and solve their problems. As Acemoğlu and Robinson point out in their recent book (2013: 77), when the political and economic institutions are inclusive in a country, prosperity and sustained economic growth can be attained to the favour of the whole society. However, as the institutions start to lose their inclusiveness and extractive institutions start to take their place which only favours a minority, masses start to suffer. As corruption increases and majority of the society start to suffer from austerity and other reforms, the minority keeps extracting the country's resources, worsening the situation faced by the majority even further.

Greece has undergone this transition from inclusive to extractive political and economic institutions (Kovras & Loizides, 2015: 54) where the majority at the end has come to such a point that they could not stand it anymore. As has been emphasized by the former Greek Prime Minister George Papandreou; as a result of the corruptive bureaucratic processes, in the face of economic crisis and austerity measures, resources of the country have not been used efficiently (Kutlay & Keleş, 2015: 45).

It has been in this environment that Syriza has come to power by winning 149 seats in a parliament consisting of 300 seats. Its major promise has been based on moving the country from extractive to inclusive political and economic institutions which involve all the opposition against the existing patronage based system (Stevens, January 6, 2015). This system has been the local outcome of neoliberal globalization as well as the inefficient institutional design of the EU. Uncontrolled populism in Greece over the last couple of years together with inefficient growth had led to a deep polarization in the society which has brought Syriza to power at the end offering a dramatic change in favor of inclusive political and economic institutions.

According to Syriza, the economic system of the post-1980 period in Europe has created a motivation for increased borrowing. While there was increasing financial deregulation, monetary policy in the Eurozone was being managed by a centralized institution; the European Central Bank, however, fiscal policy making was still decentralized. In addition to these, the existing institutions were not paying enough attention to current account deficits and loss of competitiveness on the side of the southern countries. Therefore, currently, Syriza accuses the EU policies for the humanitarian disaster faced by the Greek people today. Instead, Syriza promises Greek people an economy which would be able to pay back its debt by a sustainable economic growth (Kutlay, 2015: 36-37).

All in all, these promises cannot be achieved by Syriza alone. Syriza can achieve its promises as the EU overcomes its institutional asymmetry and take necessary measures to prepare the union for a sustainable future. For this to happen, Germany and other countries in the EU should remember to balance their national interests with their common European interests. Especially, Germany, which seems still unwilling to act as the leader of the Eurozone (Hübner, 2015), should take on the responsibility to activate the motor of integration to create the inclusive economic and political institutions within the Eurozone to make it sustainable and attractive.

In addition to these, the German way of managing the crisis has further eroded the democratic credentials of the EU as well as its norm setting capacity and its transformative power. As a result of the crisis, the southern members feel marginalized under the “*creditor north versus debtor south dichotomy*” (Kutlay, 2015 : 40). This can be seen in Syriza’s accusation of the EU as a neo-colonial power. As an extension of this accusation, Syriza sees itself as the “*trigger for a southern European uprising against the Ger-*

man-dominated management of the euro economy” (Neuger and Chrepa, January 15, 2015). Under these circumstances, Syriza victory seems to extend the Greek borders and represent a broader problem within the EU. Therefore, the future success of Syriza depends on how the EU will manage to design a future for itself.

Soros (2014) declares that the divergences between the creditor and debtor nations in the EU have widened due to the German approach to euro. The debtor nations have started to feel resentful and disempowered facing almost “an old-fashioned empire ruled by a domineering German hegemon” (Soros & Schmid, 2014: xii, Hübner, 2015). Although this might not be specifically aimed by Germany, the financial crisis has transformed the EU into a foreign oppressor in the eyes of many Europeans. In Greece, Syriza victory represents a breaking point in the name of this peripheral opposition. However, neither the break-up of the euro area nor the dissolution of the EU would be an optimal solution to the problems faced by Greece, southern European countries and Europe. In this respect, rather than disintegration at any level, the revival of the EU with Germany taking the responsibility to restructure the peripheral Europe would serve the interests of all.

c. Syriza and the EU

One of the cornerstones of European integration policy since the Maastricht Treaty of 1992 has been fiscal austerity which has been supported by the powerful EU members led by Germany. According to Germany, fiscal integration requires austerity and cost containment. Therefore, with the debt crisis in Greece, the EU has immediately called for a bailout program to help Greece service its debt and has introduced the austerity measures to help the country recover. These measures have further deprived the country. During its political campaign, Syriza put the blame on these measures and accused the EU for the humanitarian crisis which had developed in Greece.

According to Syriza; the financial crisis has made the divide between European economies visible, that there were strong and weak members in the EU, representing the core and the periphery or the creditors and the debtors (Lin and Treichel, 2012). In an interview, Ian Bremmer⁸¹ emphasizes that “Syriza repudiates Europe’s existing order” (Park, January 28,

⁸¹ Ian Bremmer is an American political scientist. He is the President and the founder of the Eurasia Group, a political risk research and consulting company.

2015). This is a repudiation of the German-led austerity and economic management in Europe. There will be a great need for compromise to overcome the crisis in Greece, the possible crisis in other Southern European members and for the establishment of a stronger and sustainable future in the EU.

For the EU, the real threat is not only Syriza or a possible Grexit. However, there are other southern countries like Spain, Portugal and Italy which are facing similar social and economic problems like Greece as a result of their austerity programs. The real problem for the EU would be its inability to find appropriate solutions to the problems of these countries in the near future and its incapacity to evolve in the direction of a sustainable future. A sustainable EU integration cannot be possible without a sustainable Greek recovery (Hopkins, 2015).

Although Syriza accuses the EU for the present crisis, it nevertheless needs the EU for a solution, since it needs financial support above everything. Apart from the EU, there are a couple of other foreign actors who might support Greece. Russia is one of them. Most of the members of Syriza, as well as the new Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras himself, politically descend from the pro-Russian Communist party (Christides, March 12, 2015). Therefore, the Syriza Government has close relations with Russia; however, Russia itself is under economic difficulty. Syriza seems to use its good relations with Russia as a bargaining tool in its current negotiations with the EU rather than replacing the EU with Russia as a major source of new loans. Besides Russia, the United States Government also seems to support the new Greek Government but this support does not seem to be financial in content. Due to the effects of the financial crisis of 2007 on its own economy, the United States seems to be willing to support Greece by words rather than the extension of new credits. Therefore, the United States does not constitute an alternative source of loans for Syriza that would replace the EU, either.

Under these circumstances, the Syriza Government seems to need the EU at least financially to overcome this crisis. Already, Syriza is not taking its position against the EU but it is trying to improve its negotiating position with the EU and come up with concrete improvements in its credit relationship with the Troika. Therefore, leaving Euro or the EU would not benefit Greece under the present circumstances. On the other hand, a Grexit might damage the European integration project and hence create the possibility of a domino effect within the Eurozone. Therefore, the EU seems to be

willing to negotiate with Greece for new terms rather than losing Greece. The lenders are the big German banks and the financial powers of the EU. They are expected to motivate the EU for a new deal with Greece to enable it to repay its debts. Shortly, politically and financially, the EU would also be willing to negotiate with Greece. However, this crisis will have important impacts both on Greece and the EU. Greece will try to put its own house into order and the EU will try to strengthen itself for the future in an effort to eliminate the possibility of such crisis in other members in the near future.

At present, Germany is the economic and financial leader of the EU. For the Germans, the way of dealing with a debt crisis is through austerity measures and structural reforms. Under the present circumstances, it is very hard for the German Chancellor Angela Merkel to manoeuvre. Moving away from the austerity measures might cause her to lose inside and revive other Southern members outside to ask for the same. On the other hand, not being able to end this crisis successfully would lead her to lose her power in Germany and at the same time it would damage the European integration project.

Although there is rising Euroskepticism in many member countries, European integration is still very useful for the members especially when the new dynamics in the world are taken into account such as the possibility of an escalation in Russia-Ukraine relations, the increasing concerns about terrorist attacks in Europe, the increasing public support for radical parties in member states as well as the strengthening of the emerging economies in the world (Park, January 28, 2015).

The EU has such a history that crises have always been turned to an opportunity to transform the Union and adapt it to new circumstances. Presently, the EU again faces a crisis which actually is not only about Greece but goes beyond. For the last couple of years, public trust in the EU and in its institutions has fallen dramatically. With the economic challenges which have hardened even more with the financial crisis, Euroskepticism has reached record highs. Europe needs change. It needs to create new jobs and economic growth, establish efficient financial and economic institutions as well as control mechanisms, champion democracy and democratic values. To achieve all these, it needs leadership (Matthijs & Kelemen, 2015). Towards the end of 2014, the European institutions; namely the European Parliament, the European Commission and the European Council, have wel-

comed their new leaders. They will have an important responsibility to carry the EU to the future from a period of crisis.

The Syriza victory taken together with all its promises poses questions as to how Greece will be able to reach a compromise with the EU to be able to realize its promises. In this respect, both parties have already taken steps in directions which they have declared they would not. The EU has accepted to give Greece an additional four months for repayment of their debt in return for increasing Greek reforms on taxes and corruption (Traynor, March 2, 2015. Although, Syriza has promised before the elections to leave the austerity program and cut its relations with the Troika, it has accepted this deal.

For the last couple of years, the EU is trying to make a decision on its future. Since then, the major policies of the EU, deepening and widening, are under discussion. The EU members have still not been able to take the decisions that will transform the EU for the years ahead. In this respect, the Greek crisis might have the effect of accelerating the decisions concerning the future of the EU and push the EU for a transformation. With the Greek crisis and the Syriza victory, the Europeans have started to question the efficiency of their financial recipes and economic policies.

Just like it has happened in the previous economic crisis, the present economic crisis in the EU is forcing the member countries to take action for more responsibility in restoring peace and prosperity in Europe. As Midde-laar emphasizes (2013: 413); the turbulence inside together with increasing instability outside are forcing the members to create and recreate Europe in an effort to fight all the problems. Under these circumstances, the Syriza victory might act as a turning point in both the future of Greece as well as the EU.

Anything which might have an impact on Greece and the EU will have repercussions on Turkey, Greco-Turkish relations as well as Turkish-EU relations. Greco-Turkish relations have a long and problematic history. Besides Turkey's relationship with the EU has also been a long and slow process. Although the initiation of formal relations between Turkey and the EU goes back to the Ankara Agreement signed in 1963, the accession negotiations have started in 2005. Since 2005, only a couple of chapters have been opened and it has only been possible to close one chapter provisionally. Presently, Turkey's relations with Greece and the EU continue with ups and downs. The Syriza victory with lots of promises of change on many issues,

then, might be utilized to improve the Greco-Turkish relations to the benefit of both parties within the EU structure leading to a win-win situation for all the parties involved.

III. Greco-Turkish relations: Quo vadis?

To answer the question “where are Greco-Turkish relations going”, one needs to explore at least four grounds. One of them is about the perspectives opened by the installment of a new government in Greece (a). Because Cyprus occupies a crucial place in such analyses, it deserves to be studied apart (b). The same holds true for the European Union as well (c). Last, but not least, a new institutional framework of relations set up by Ankara and Athens, along with the perspective of further cooperation schemes it opened, are worth focusing on.

a. A new horizon for the relations?

It is a truism to assert that the Greco-Turkish relations have not always been easy. However, a palpable warming of these relations, which is materialized by various mechanisms and high-level visits, can be observed from 1999 onwards (Republic of Turkey, MFA, 2010). In this new era, statesmen from both sides of the Aegean Sea have shared the will to carry the political relations forward, colouring the bilateral relations with much less antagonism. This new environment found its reflection at the societal level as well: Opinion polls showed that nearly 50% of the Greek people supported a *rapprochement* with Turkey in 2011 and less than 10% of the Turks perceived a threat from Greece in 2007 although both nations saw each other as the enemy number one in early 2000s (Dayıoğlu, 2013).

Indeed, the improvement of relations and a more positive perception of the other do not mean that the Greco-Turkish dispute in the Aegean basin has drawn to a close. Both capitals have a differing perspective on the very nature of the problems and the means to adopt for solving them. For Turkey, there are a number of long-running questions that need to be taken into consideration together: territorial waters, continental shelf, flight information region, air space, demilitarized status of the islands, islets and rocks (Republic of Turkey, MFA). For Greece, however, there is only one outstanding dispute with Turkey that needs to be resolved in accordance with the international law -particularly the law of the sea (Hellenic Republic, MFA).

In such a context, Syriza's coming to power has been seen as an important event by Turkish policymakers -as all government changes in Greece

do. One particular reason why Tsipras' election victory grabbed attention on the eastern side of the Aegean Sea was due to **the** party's radical left-wing agenda. Turkish policy-makers were also interested by **its** stance on their country. In fact, some of the party members' rhetoric had already led to optimism for the future of Greco-Turkish relations. Already in 2012, Tsipras had stated that he considered the improvement of relations with Turkey as a "top priority", stressing that both Athens and Ankara had paid a high price because of the *cold war* in the Aegean region (BBC, 2012). Syriza's leader also pointed to a possible "win win" situation for both sides, with the proviso that the rooted disagreements be surmounted. Earlier the same year, a senior official from the party had sent upbeat messages to Turkey by affirming that Greece and Turkey had "many common points to overcome the historical problems", highlighting the need of partnership between the two countries (Today's Zaman, 2012).

In late 2014, he made a similar statement showing his party's support for enhancing cooperation with Turkey in a number of fields, "for the benefit of the people of the two countries" as well as "for peace and stability in the region" (AMNA, 2014a). After the electoral victory, the nomination of Nikos Kotzias to the post of foreign minister has also been meaningful. The message of "love and friendship" that he sent to the Turkish people shortly after assuming his ministerial post should be interpreted together with his role in the implementation of the "earthquake diplomacy" in 1999. Back then, Kotzias was the special adviser of the foreign minister Papandreou and he endeavoured much for the establishment of friendlier relations between Greece and Turkey. He is also believed to have had an impact upon the decision on Turkey's candidacy status in Helsinki Summit of December 1999 (Anadolu Agency, 2015a).

It goes without saying that any Greek disposition to come to terms with Turkey would find an echo on the Turkish side. The Prime Minister (PM) of Turkey maintained -a short while before Greek elections- that there were no longer "psychological obstacles" between the two countries for cooperation (CNA, 2014). This assertion was obviously based on a more-than-decade-long improvement of bilateral relations. If there have not been ground-breaking agreements on sensitive issues, the progress made so far marks the step-down of hostilities and gives hope for more conciliation in the future (Athanassopoulou, 2007).

Turkish government showed its willingness to carry the process forward, because there is much to gain from it. Because shaky relations and

conflict risks with Greece are among the factors that undermine Turkey's image in the international arena, Turkish decision-makers naturally tend to grasp all opportunities for a better dialogue with their counterparts. Nevertheless, Turkey should not set high expectations. Athens' desire to get in close connection with Ankara has never been unconditional, and the Syriza period proves no exception in this sense. When Tsipras affirmed that he would opt for a dialogue with Turkey, he did not shy away from criticizing Turkey's political choices. To him, the international law -and the respect of national sovereignty- must provide for the basis of the dialogue. Thus, Turkey must cease to be a national security threat to Greece by dropping her threat of war. Although members of the Turkish government downplayed disagreements on several occasions, some official declarations have led to Greek authorities' perception of military threat from the eastern coasts of the Aegean Sea as laid out in the next section.

With regard to the delineation of the Aegean continental shelf, Tsipras wants it to be submitted to the International Court of Justice (ICJ). However, the Court declared itself without jurisdiction on the issue (ICJ, 1978). Ankara holds to this decision. The agreement signed in Bern in November 1976 between Turkey and Greece -where both parties commit to negotiate in order to resolve their differences- provides the basis on which Turkey wants the problem to be regulated (Republic of Turkey, MFA).

The proposal on an armament moratorium constitutes another pillar of Syriza's policies towards Turkey. In 2012, the party's leader expressed his intention to suggest a mutual moratorium to Turkey (HRI, 2012). Indeed, the feasibility of the project is doubtful: The defence spending in Turkey being the outcome of a much more composite process than Greece, it is unlikely that Turkish decision-makers accept to reduce armament expenditures through an agreement with Greece. But Tsipras' intention reflects Syriza's inability to conceive a reduction in the Greek arsenal without ensuring a reciprocal move in Ankara.

Taken together, these statements indicate a strong parallelism between the current Greek government and its predecessors. They also show that the scepticism still persists on the Greek side despite the existence of a friendly rhetoric. It is also important to remember that Tsipras chose to form a coalition with Anel, a populist right-wing party. Its leader, Panos Kammenos, did not shy away from symbolically attacking Turkish nationalism (Dimitrakopoulos, 2015). Thus, one can expect that the above-mentioned

scepticism will be long-lived. Undoubtedly, it will also have an impact upon the Cypriot question.

b. The thorny question of Cyprus

One of the most serious disputes between Ankara and Athens arises from the Cypriot question. The Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), established nine years after the Turkish military intervention of 1974 that followed a coup sponsored by the junta regime in Athens, lacks international recognition. The Greek Cypriot leadership, recognised as the legitimate heir of the Republic of Cyprus established in 1960, is acknowledged to have the exclusive jurisdiction of the entire island. Because Turkey does not recognize the government of south, she refuses to open her ports to Greek-Cypriot-registered vessels -a matter that marred her relations with the EU since the accession of Cyprus to the European Union in 2004 before the unification of the island.

Like most Greek prime ministers, Tsipras chose to pay his first foreign visit to Cyprus after assuming his post -and consequently showed the importance he attached to the Cypriot question. The Syriza government supports the traditional Greek position on a bi-zonal and bi-communal federation model with a single sovereignty. Tsipras and his team also uphold the island's unification negotiations as conceived and implemented by the Greek Cypriot administration.

Earlier statements of Tsipras show his resentment on the lack of a positive step from Turkey on the way to resolve the Cypriot question. In his view, Turkey's failure to have a constructive attitude while Greece and Greek Cyprus have been simultaneously supporting Turkey's future membership to the European Union makes this situation all the more unbearable (BBC, 2012). While it seems possible to question the “support” extended from the Cypriot side, one can maintain that the deadlock on Cyprus does not cease to be a barrier between Greece and Turkey.

Since early 2010s, the finds of substantial hydrocarbon resources offshore Cyprus added a new dimension to the Cypriot question. The discovery was considered, at least for some while, an opportunity for a long-sought solution. After all, the gigantic economic value of the reserves and the necessity to ensure stability in the region for exploiting and selling the natural gas could force all sides to seek a resolution. Yet, the discovery did not only result in optimism. Turkey's decision to send a seismic vessel

named *Barbaros Hayreddin Paşa* off the Cypriot shore was perceived in Athens as a “violation” of the Greek Cypriot territorial waters and Exclusive Economic Zone in October 2014. Tsipras bitterly criticized Turkey and depicted the event as a “clear violation of international law” and “a sabotage of peace negotiations” (PMS, 2015b).

The dispatch of the research vessel drove Nicos Anastasiades, leader of the south Cypriot community, to withdraw from the island’s unification talks as a protest move. Tsipras’ backing of this decision is plain to see in his statements. During his visit to the island, he embraced the end of Turkish vessel’s activities as a condition for the return to the negotiation table (PMS, 2015a). While emphasising the right of Greek Cypriot authorities to explore fossil fuels, he called on Turkey not to threaten them (Today’s Zaman, 2015a). Later on, after Barbaros Hayreddin Paşa had been withdrawn by Turkey, he maintained that the circumstances were “better for the restart of the discussions” (Anadolu Agency, 2015b). Turkey, for its part, maintains that a solution to the Cypriot problem must be found before resorting to oil drilling activities. Ankara opposes any unilateral move by the Greek-Cypriot authorities, maintaining that the island’s natural resources belong to both communities (PMS, 2015b).

As for the Turkish Cypriot authorities, they sided with their Turkish counterparts. President Derviş Eroğlu pointed to the existence of the continental shelf agreement signed with Turkey and reiterated his proposal to establish a joint committee to work on hydrocarbon resources (Ruhluel, 2014). Yet, the equitable sharing of the natural gas is a source of discord between Turkey and the Greek Cyprus. Ankara believes that the Turkish Cypriot community must have its share while the Greek Cypriot administration denies such a right as long as the island remains divided. Syriza government supports Anastasiades' rejection to go back to the negotiation table and the official Greek Cypriot stance on the oil sharing.

To the general surprise, however, Tsipras broke a taboo by holding talks with Turkish Cypriots during which he expressed his trust to the Cypriot people's efforts to re-unite the island and his government's willingness to work for it (Arslan, 2015). His meeting with the members of non-governmental organisations was described as a very “positive step” by Turkey's EU Affairs Minister, Volkan Bozkır (Today’s Zaman, 2015b). An important point concerning this meeting is that it took place in the southern part of the island. Tsipras, by not crossing to the north, made a tactical choice

which prevented criticism from his Greek constituency and the Greek Cypriot community.

In light of the considerations outlined above, it seems difficult to expect a change in Greece's policy on Cyprus in a foreseeable future. This view is shared in the TRNC's political milieu. The spokesperson of the presidency, Osman Ertuğ, drew attention to the similarity between the rhetoric used by Tsipras and those used by his predecessors (Arslan, 2015). For some, the result of the recent Northern Cypriot presidential election raises hopes for the future of the island (Financial Times, 2015). Nevertheless, although the Greek Prime Minister maintained that the electoral victory of Mustafa Akıncı was “noteworthy”, how much the new political landscape in Cyprus may lead to optimism is yet unknown.

c. The EU as an indispensable framework for Greco-Turkish relations

As mentioned earlier, both Turkey and Greece have perceived the gains to attain by reducing the antagonism towards each other. If bilateral initiatives have played an important part in the improvement of Greco-Turkish relations, highlighting the European Union's key position is not a futile effort either. This claim is justified by the researches which demonstrate that the Europeanization is not limited to the EU membership. Candidate states (Yavaş, 2013; Schimmelfennig, 2012; Vachudova, 2008; Sedelmeier, 2006; Grabbe, 2001) and even third states (Freyburg et al., 2010; Demetrepoulou, 2002) can become subjects of Europeanization. Turkey, due to the candidate status she was granted in the Helsinki Summit of 1999, clearly opted for a more cooperative attitude towards Greece -a fact that can be explained by the search of foreign policy convergence with the European Union (Yavaş, 2013). Turkey's change of attitude can also be justified by her incorporation into a non-war and security community (Rumelili, 2007). Both arguments point to a shift in Turkey's political choices as a consequence of an improved position vis-à-vis the European integration process.

Studies show that Greek foreign and defence policies have undergone a gradual Europeanization overtime (Kalaitzidis, 2009; Agnantopoulos, 2010; Stavridis, 2003). If the foreign policy issues have not been brought up during Syriza's electoral campaign, there are grounds to believe that the new government will not move Greek foreign policy away from the EU's common security and defence policy. Tsipras unambiguously stated that the

Greek state was "bound by" and that it would "comply with" the agreements signed so far with the EU and NATO (Ummelas and Rudnitsky, 2015).

Another point that will most probably not be very different from before is Athens' decision to support Turkey's EU membership process. It has been proven that this policy is profitable for Greek governments while being totally harmless and risk-free. Even if the net results are not always easy to discern, the official advocacy of Turkey's decades-long EU bid guarantees some warming in the bilateral relations. Besides, in the absence of a strong European-level support to Turkish membership, Athens has practically nothing to lose in backing Ankara. This comfortable position of the Greek government is perceptible in the foreign minister's opinion on Turkey-EU relations. According to Kotzas, the negotiations on Turkey's EU membership are stalled for the European countries are not enthusiastic about Turkish accession ("Tsipras signals", 2015).

For the current Greek government, keeping in line with the European foreign and security policy and continuing to back Turkey's European odyssey go beyond a simple choice of sticking to the decisions that have been taken previously. Syriza's electoral triumph was largely fuelled by Greek constituency's widespread anger over the austerity measures. Tsipras had pledged to make of Greece the co-author of the reimbursement terms. Yet, in time, it was understood that all the election promises would not be kept to the letter. The Greek PM has been criticized for having made concessions on his campaign pledge (Guillot, 2015). In the spring of 2015, the Syriza-ANEL coalition was in a dire need to present a comprehensive reform plan suitable to be endorsed by the European Union's finance ministers.

In such a context, Greece has an interest in reconciling with Turkey so as to eliminate the possibility of war. This would lead to a decrease in defence spending and create the much-valued additional funds to remedy the substantial debt issue. In 2014, an approximate 2,5% of Greece's GDP was allocated to the military expenditures against an average of 3,12% in 1990s (World Bank). This decrease is meaningful, and one can rightfully argue that the EU is a significant framework for Greco-Turkish relations on two counts. The Europeanization of the relations is, on the one hand, politically fruitful and safe for Athens. On the other hand, it may be considered as a partial cure for a deep financial problem.

d. Greco-Turkish cooperation frameworks: More can be done

In 2010, during the then Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's official visit to Athens, the High Level Cooperation Council (HLCC) was inaugurated in presence of various Greek and Turkish ministers –reflecting the importance attached and the support provided to this initiatives from both sides of the Aegean Sea. The heads of the executive maintained a structured framework with the conviction that it would promote the Greco-Turkish relations and enhance peace, stability and prosperity in the region (Hellenic Republic, MFA, 2010).

Since its establishment, the HLCC convened three times in May 2010, March 2013 and December 2014. The first meeting of the HLCC was marked by the signing of 21 agreements, memorandums and declarations covering a wide range of cooperation fields –including foreign policy, internal affairs, economy, energy, research, transport and tourism. Agreements were also reached between Turkish and Greek semi-official news agencies, standardisation agencies and bank associations (Enterprise Greece, 2010). The second HLCC was also fruitful, with more than two dozen documents signed. Besides, a Turkish-Greek Business Forum that took place the same day of the HLCC gathered more than 500 businessmen from both countries (Republic of Turkey, MFA, 2013). The last HLCC ended with a joint statement on the intention for closer bilateral cooperation encompassing several sectors and a -predictable- disagreement on the Cyprus problem.

Turkish Prime Minister Ahmed Davutoğlu depicted the aftermath of the HLCC meetings as “exceptional” and stressed his commitment to carry on the process by referring to the climate of mutual trust it offered. He also brought up the possibility that Greece and Turkey can overcome political disagreements through the development of bilateral relations (TRT, 2014). A similar attitude could also be seen in the statement made by the previous Greek Prime Minister, Antonis Samaras:

“We made a broad review of the work that has been done in the last four years. We have signed 47 cooperation agreements and we have agreed to work towards the implementation of those agreements. Our aim is the promotion of the cooperation in sectors of low politics that however, touch the citizens' everyday life. In our bilateral relations are issues on which we disagree. We recognise it and we are creating relations of mutual respect with full respect to the international law and to the safeguarding of the national sovereignty.” (AMNA, 2014b).

Alexis Tsipras shared the view that the HLCC was key platform for promoting cooperation on issues of low politics. Yet, he clearly and strongly objected to the convening of the third HLCC by touching on the anxiety caused by Barbaros Hayreddin Paşa's research activities around Cyprus. In his opinion, the meetings that take place since 2010 do not constitute a suitable framework for negotiations on the Cypriot problem. Thus, compared with Samaras, Tsipras seems to be less optimistic on the political potential of the HLCC meetings.

The institutionalised dialogue between Ankara and Athens created through the HLCC may have deficiencies. Yet, it constitutes an important platform worth supporting. Both Davutoğlu and Tsipras believe that the improvement of relations between the two countries is not only good for their own people but also crucial for the peace and stability in the region. Holding firmly to the mechanisms provided by the HLCC is particularly important for Greece which is in a gloomy economic and political situation since 2008.

The most important domain of cooperation is, no doubt, tourism. Figures help justify this assertion. Turkish people's interest in their western neighbour is in on the rise. Greece was a destination for only 200,348 Turkish tourists in 2009. Three years later, the number rocketed to 602,306, meaning an increase of more than 200% (MFA). Because further growth was already in sight, the numbers of the following years have not been surprising. The Director of Institutional Relations at the Association of Turkish Travel Agencies (TÜRSAB), Gülberk Aşyapar, affirmed that more than 740.000 visitors of Turkish nationality chose the Hellenic Republic in 2014. Figures on the opposite direction provided by the Director are also thought-provoking: In 2005, around 141.000 Greek tourists chose Turkey for their travel plans. In 2014, the number was higher than 740.000. Both Greece and Turkey aim to receive more than one million tourists from each other's countries (İHA, 2015).

In the Greek case, the increase of the number of citizens that travelled to Turkey in the context of economic crisis is significant. So is the Turkish tourists' contribution to Greek national economy. The statistical data above give us also the possibility to ponder on how useful cooperation on tourism would be for both countries. The idea preoccupied the minds of Greek decision-makers earlier on. Olga Kefalogianni, Minister of Tourism under Samaras government, sought to cooperate with Turkey by organising meetings (Hacı, 2012; AMNA, 2012). Nevertheless, Greek government has

not announced any such initiatives so far. The only move was limited to a proposal of a seventy-two-hour-visa offered by a group of 18 deputies (Hürriyet, 2015).

For at least two reasons, the non-existence of plans to cooperate with Turkey in the field of tourism is surprising. First, Tsipras is a leader that considers a multifaceted tourism as “one of the pillars for development and productive reorganisation” (Berteau, 2015). Thus, one can wonder why Turkey does not fall into one of the “sides” of this key sector. Second, an immediate growth in the tourism sector will have quick repercussions on the main economic sector in Greece. As Nikkos Magginas at National Bank of Greece reminds, the loss of support from the tourism sector is among the reasons why unemployment rates soar (BBC, 2014). Therefore, one has the right to expect the issue to be brought up during Tsipras’ visit to Ankara whose date is as yet unknown.

IV. Epilogue and Conclusion

The fact that Greece needs very large funds in order to fight against the financial bottleneck in which she found herself is more than obvious. At the time this article was written, Tsipras and his finance minister were in an intense struggle with the foreign creditors with little hope in sight for their government to keep Syriza’s election promises. The recession, along with very high unemployment rates and a clear deficiency of productive investments, became the characteristics of Greek economy over the years.

This grim context places the Greco-Turkish relations in a particularly important position. As discussed earlier in this study, an attitude of cautious *rapprochement* is perceived in the Greek case. Yet, it is also easy to discern the existence of long-established barriers that impede the progress of reconciliation. On this background, the European Union’s positive impact in the political field remains limited.

At this point, one must remember that political disagreements do not have to constitute a hurdle against the cooperation. In the past, the two governments could benefit from commercial links. It is therefore possible to recommend the development of the existing mechanisms and their spillover into other sectors. One must remember that the cooperation between Turkey and Greece is promising due to the reciprocal governmental support in both countries despite serious political divergences that have been outlined above. The process can be propelled ahead through a clear political determination.

The adoption of the most-favoured-nation clause can be one example of a political move that would lead to a significant change for the economic relations between Athens and Ankara. In the same vein, the creation of common trade and transport centers are also advisable.

The fields of cooperation will be further diversified if the private sector is encouraged to take bold steps as well. In other words, common trade and investment opportunities must be seized. Technology, industry, agriculture, ship management, pharmaceuticals are among a plethora of sectors where businessmen from the two countries can invest together. The establishment of associate companies can be considered an important initiative that can create a synergy for national economies. Likewise, intermediate institutions for leasing and factoring may prove useful for boosting the economies. Another option for contributing to the well-being of Greek and Turkish nations would be to establish a common stock exchange.

One has the right to claim that an intense cooperation between Greece and Turkey, both in governmental and societal levels, may eventually contribute to ease the political tensions. The question as to whether such a process can be implemented under the leadership of Tsipras is not easy to answer. The Greek Prime Minister believes in the importance of a dialogue with Turkey. He believes in the necessity to keep the channels of communication between Ankara and Athens open. However, he also believes that economic cooperation must be preconditioned by political progress. It is therefore unlikely to witness a progress in the political realm generated by economic successes –and not vice versa. Within such a context, it seems possible to maintain that the cautious approach adopted by the Greek government will lead to -if any- a very slow process of reconciliation.

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