



Turkey: Greece rapprochement process in the post: Cold war period

Vikash Kumar

Research Scholar, Centre for West Asian Studies, School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India

Abstract

Since 1960s when the Cold war situation changed and the Aegean dispute, Cyprus conflict and other conflicts emerged Turkish-Greek cooperation ended. Since 1960s both countries' bilateral relations deteriorated due to emergence of wide range of confrontational issues like escalation of Cyprus conflict in mid 1960s and disagreement on the Aegean Sea issue, especially on the issue of exploration and exploitation of mineral resources from Aegean Sea and Turkish military invasion in 1974 in Cyprus. For the first time, conflict on Aegean Sea had emerged due to disagreement over continental shelf in mid 1960s. Due to exploration activity both countries came on the brink of war in 1976 and 1987 during cold war period. A series of confrontations on Aegean Sea issue emerged during cold war period. This study will discuss major causes of confrontation between Turkey and Greece. Again in 1982 conflict emerged between two countries due to Greece's sovereignty claim over territorial waters up to 12-nautical miles in the Aegean Sea. Apart from Aegean Sea dispute, Cyprus problem was another issue which led to deterioration of bilateral relations during cold war period. Turkey's invasion of Cyprus in 1974 was a turning point for Turkey-Greece relations. Turkey's Cyprus invasion was perceived by Greece as a major threat to its national security which was more than the threat of Warsaw pact during Cold war. This threat perception continued during the 1990s. On the other hand, during Cold war period Turkey believed that Greece's policy towards Aegean and Cyprus was concerned with Greece's megali ideas. This study aims to analyse and examine rapprochement approach between Turkey and Greece.

Keywords: cold war, post-cold war period, Aegean Sea dispute, Cyprus conflict, minority issue, rapprochement process

1. Introduction

The Post-Cold war era promoted both order and disorder. With the end of the Cold war some old regional conflicts were solved, many like Cyprus lingered on in the Post-Cold War period. The end of cold war has negatively affected Turkish-Greek relations. Relations between Greece and Turkey, the two NATO allies in the eastern Mediterranean, remained tense after the end of the Cold war while the traditional cycle of conflict-negotiations-conflict prevailed as the common feature of new era (Dokos and Tsakonas 2003, p. 19) ^[17]. Despite the end of the Cold war and the dissolution of Warsaw Pact, their relations were worse in the 1990s. The fragile relations between the two NATO allies in the early Post-Cold war were not new. Rather it was the consequence of hostile bilateral relations of Cold war period which continued well into the post-cold war period. The tensions that existed between Greece and Turkey had been a major source of international concern. Indeed, throughout the Cold War period, a war between two NATO partners posed a serious threat to the security of the West as a whole (Lindsay 2007, p. 3) ^[11].

During Cold war Period eastern Mediterranean region was security concern for US led NATO due to threat of communism. In this regard Turkey and Greece were most important for prevention of Soviet influence in the eastern Mediterranean region. Hence, Indeed, fearing that any major conflict between the two countries would be exploited by the Soviet Union, Washington spent most of the 1960s, when the East-West confrontation was at its height, trying to keep a lid on the growing tensions between the two countries, which were mainly driven at that time by the

dispute over the island of Cyprus (Lindsay 2007, p. 3) ^[11]. Due to threat perception from Soviet Union and support by US led western alliance like NATO Turkey and Greece were drawn close cooperation in the initial decade of Cold war. However, Soviet threat perception had not always prevented conflict between the two NATO allies during Cold war, but regional balance in the eastern Mediterranean region had prevented escalation of conflict between two countries. There were no confidence-building measures, communication channel and dialogue process for normalization of relations in case of confrontational situation during Cold War period. However, during Cold War period both countries had tried to start dialogue process for normalization of relations, but due to domestic pressure, lack of interest and disagreement on issue all efforts ended in vain. In this regard the 1976 Bern agreement and the 1988 Davos negotiations were important. Bern agreement was signed for maintaining status quo on Aegean continental shelf, but Bern initiative ended in 1981 due to Greece's lack of interest. Davos initiative had opened communication channel and dialogue process for normalization of bilateral relations. Both countries signed agreement to avoid conflict situation in Aegean region.

Reconciliation Process

Apart from bilateral tension in 1990s, both countries had started reconciliation process for normalization of relations. In this context the 1997 Madrid agreement was important. It was first bilateral agreement between both countries in the Post-Cold war period. Turkey had first time accepted provisions of international law and international agreement

in bilateral talks for bilateral issues. Madrid agreement was remarkable for bilateral relations, because after Davos initiative both countries refrained from dialogue process. Before Madrid agreement Balkan rivalry and Imia/Kardak crisis had deteriorated bilateral relations. There was no communication channel during Imia/Kardak crisis for normalization of confrontational situation. Hence, Madrid agreement provided dialogue process between both countries. Most positive consequence of Madrid initiative was both countries agreed to avoid hostile situation. The NATO Summit in Madrid in July 1997 indicated the possibility of improved relations with Turkey. The Greek and Turkish leaders made a pledge to respect each other's rights and avoid the use of force against one another in the future (Moustakis 2003, p. 44) ^[12]. Madrid agreement was within framework of North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Madrid declaration of 8 July 1997 was a systematic attempt to stabilise relations in the Aegean (Moustakis 2003, p. 51) ^[12]. After Madrid agreement both countries had started step to step dialogue and reconciliation process for normalization of relations.

Factors for Rapprochement Process

After, Madrid initiative both countries cooperated during Kosovo crisis in 1999. Kosovo crisis had created humanitarian crisis. During Kosovo crisis both countries affected from illegal immigration, drug trafficking and cross border crime (Anastasakis 2004, p. 47) ^[1]. During Kosovo crisis both countries had established contact and communication channel for tackling humanitarian crisis. Together Cooperation in Balkan and Kosovo crisis had ended Balkan rivalry. It paved the way for reconciliation process. Since second half of 1999 both countries' cooperation is increasing. In mid 1999 both countries were affected from earthquakes. During earthquake both countries had helped each other through governmental channel and civil society. Both countries' response during earthquake paved the way for cooperation and rapprochement process.

After the earthquake both countries has started rapprochement process on various issue. This earthquake rapprochement is called earthquake diplomacy or disaster diplomacy (Carkoglu and Kirisci 2004, p. 117) ^[6]. Earthquake diplomacy gets support from domestic public. Disaster diplomacy' opened the way for the development of greater ties between the people of the two countries and thus allowed for the strengthening of the dialogue developed between the two governments in advance of the earthquakes (Lindsay 2007, p. 216) ^[11].

Rapprochement process was initiated by Turkish Foreign Minister İsmail Cem and his Greek counterpart George Papandreou that was underpinned by a series of developments in both domestic and international *for a* (Evin 2005, p. 398) ^[14]. In this positive atmosphere Greece has supported Turkey's European Union candidacy in December 1999 in European Union's Helsinki summit. For support to Turkish European Union candidacy, Turkey had redefined its relations with Greece as one of the close cooperation, alliance and confidence. This was turning point for Greek-Turkish relations (Ministry of Foreign Policy, Republic of Turkey 2013) ^[18, 19].

In previous in 1997 European Union's Luxemburg summit Greece had veto on Turkey's European Union candidacy and Greece's veto for Turkish European Union candidacy

was always source of bilateral tension. Hence, Greece's decision to support Turkish candidacy was remarkable for reconciliation process. Greece's support to Turkish European Union candidacy has also changed Turkey's domestic public opinion about Greece. Helsinki decision was also about conflict prevention and method of dispute settlement. The Helsinki council decisions have also established the peaceful resolution of outstanding border disputes as a community principle and urged the candidate states 'to make every effort' to resolve any outstanding disputes, and if these efforts fail, to bring the dispute before the International Court of Justice (Bahar 2004, p. 6).

Overall, Helsinki decision has paved the way for reconciliation process between two countries. Other major consequence of Helsinki decision was connection of Turkish-Greek relations with European Union. Greece as member of European Union and Turkey as a candidate country of European Union are concerned with European Union. Hence, European Union is also involved in recent reconciliation process. European Union has supported and assists Greek Turkish civil initiatives. The Civil Society Development Programme was introduced in 2002, with a budget of €8 million for two years to promote Greek-Turkish dialogue at the grassroots level. Again in February 2004, the European Commission introduced a €35 million package to support cross-border co-operation between Greece and Turkey for 2004–06 (Rumelili 2007, p. 121) ^[4].

Areas of Rapprochement Process

Recent reconciliation process is remarkable for Turkish-Greek relationship. In this recent period of rapprochement process war like Confrontational situation has not occurred between both countries. A series of rapprochement is going on between both countries. Despite European Union's decision to provided membership to Greek republic of southern Cyprus in 2004, rapprochement process has not negatively affected. In recent reconciliation period both countries' relationship is based on mutual consent, mutual respect of sovereignty and mutual understanding. Since 2000 rapprochement process is continuing on various issues. However, recent rapprochement process is different from previous reconciliation process and cooperation. The new thaw in bilateral relations has strong domestic public support, support of the majority of the political leader, support of business and military elites (Ogzulu 2003, p. 46) ^[8]. Due to support from various areas recent rapprochement process is increasing cooperation between both countries. Rapprochement is continuing in non-confrontational areas and knotty issue has been left for future reconciliation process. Since 2010 through high level cooperation council both countries are involved in commerce, culture, transport and energy (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Turkey 2013) ^[18, 19]. Through high level cooperation council both countries have extended areas of cooperation and have involved business community in this reconciliation process. In this rapprochement process both countries have focused cooperation on military issue, political issue, cultural issue and economic issue. Bilateral Cooperation on military issue is important for future of reconciliation process, because in previous both countries' threat perception was major obstacle for normalization of relations. Hence, both countries are removing threat perception through cooperation in military issue and get military support to reconciliation process.

In this positive atmosphere both countries have not included each other as major threat in their military doctrine. The success of the latest reconciliation process between Greece and Turkey was reflected symbolically in early 2001, when Greece lifted the state of mobilisation of war against Turkey. Turkey is no longer officially considered as the prime threat to Greece. In early August 2002 Turkey's new National Security Policy Document also did not mention Greece as the top external threat to Turkey's national security (Ogzulu 2004, p. 98) ^[16]. This is remarkable step for future perspective of reconciliation process. During Cold War period and in 1990s both countries were perceived each other as major threat to their security. Hence, through positive military doctrine both countries are encouraging reconciliation process. In this military cooperation a positive step is taken by both countries when they have agreed to reduce military exercise in the Aegean Sea. Before rapprochement both countries were engaged in provocative military exercise.

Through joint military exercise and together participation in NATO's military exercise both countries have removed confrontational situation in the Aegean region. Both countries have also agreed to remove hostile situation on border. In this regard landmines have been removed from border. Both countries have solved NATO's Ezzir and Larissa military command dispute. Through confidence building measures on military both countries are strengthening relations. Both countries have established many confidence building measures in military areas like confidence building measure for avoid provocative military exercise in Aegean region, confidence building measure for search and rescue operation in Aegean Sea in case of armed incident, confidence building measure for protection from piracy and confidence building measure for removal of landmines from border.

Apart from military cooperation, in 2000 both countries have signed agreement on low confrontation issues. These agreement concerned tourism, environment protection, prevention of cross border crime, money laundering, culture, the environment, trade and commerce, multilateral cooperation, terrorism and prevention of human trafficking (Dokas and Tsakonas 2007, p. 16). Through cycle of cooperation both countries have open the new window of opportunity. In this regard initiative on Aegean Sea issue is important. In early 2002, the two foreign ministers, George Papandreou and Ismail Cem achieved a political breakthrough when they agreed that Greek and Turkish experts should start talks on a package of long-running bilateral disputes, such as airspace over the Aegean Sea and ownership of mineral rights in the seabed (Ogzulu 2004, p. 98). Now, both countries are agreed that Aegean Sea issue would settle through bilateral agreement and in case of disagreement this issue would solve through jurisdiction of International Court of Justice (ICJ). This is major achievement of recent reconciliation process, because in previous both countries' position on settlement method was differ.

One of the most important features of recent bilateral cooperation is confidence building measures. Through Confidence Building Measures (CBM) many window of cooperation has been opened. Ongoing exploratory talks on deepening Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) and frequent exchanges on a bilateral and multilateral basis have removed the overt air of suspicion that had long clouded

political relations (Tsarouhas 2009, p. 50). Both countries have established confidence building measures for prevention of illegal immigration, prevention of illegal trafficking and prevention of human trafficking. In this context in 2006 both countries have signed agreement for prevention of illegal immigration. Cooperation on political issue is continuing between Greek Prime Minister Samaras and Turkish Prime minister Erdogan.

In 2013 both countries have signed on counter terrorism agreement. Local government, civil society, non-governmental organization and other institutions are also involved in rapprochement process. Participation of Local government like municipalities in rapprochement process has extended the areas of cooperation (Evin 2004, p. 7) ^[15]. Both countries' municipalities have signed on trade and tourism agreement. Civil society is also encouraging cooperation between both countries. Through workshop and joint project civil society is involved in rapprochement process. Participation of Civil society in reconciliation process is important, because civil society is a source of people to people contact. European Union is also encouraging rapprochement process through financial support to civil society. In this context European Commission has initiated the Greek-Turkish civic dialogue programme in 2002.

Apart from rapprochement process on political issue, both countries have started rapprochement process on cultural issue. In this regard both countries are cooperating in education area, youth and sports, on minority issue and in arts area. Remarkable achievement of reconciliation process is settlement of minority issue. In previous of reconciliation process issue of Muslim Turks of Western Thrace and Greek Orthodox minority were core confrontational issue between two countries. Before reconciliation processes both countries were perceived respected Greek orthodox and Muslim Turks minority as threat to their security. In recent reconciliation process both countries have settled some minority issue like freedom of expression, religious freedom and settlement of Greek orthodox in Istanbul. In reconciliation period both countries have provided protection to cultural heritage of minority and full protection of their rights.

Conclusion

The cooperation areas are wider between two countries. From grassroots cooperation to national government level cooperation are going on. At grassroots level civil society, Non-governmental organization and local institutions are involved in reconciliation process, while at national government level both countries' government are involved in reconciliation process. Thus, recent reconciliation process is different from previous reconciliation process, because it is also going on at grassroots level and gets domestic support. In previous reconciliation process domestic public was not concerned. Only both countries' government have initiated reconciliation process.

Overall, despite disagreements on confrontational issues both countries' relations are improving. In all, the Turkish-Greek relationship, traditionally characterised by mutual hostility, has over the past decade undergone a qualitative transformation as reflected in the conciliatory statements issued from both sides, and more so, in the language of cooperation and dialogue. All the same, the core problematic issues, particularly as they relate to hard

security, remain unresolved. Amidst the lingering uncertainty about Turkey's European integration and its growing frustration with the stalemate in Cyprus since the Annan Plan referendum 2004, the rapprochement process has yielded precious little in terms of a long-term settlement of differences over the Aegean border and the Cyprus tangle. The current state of Turkish-Greek relations is thus described as one of "non-tension" rather than deep cooperation.

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