

# **P**olitical Factors affecting Cooperation between Italy, Greece and Turkey

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## **Introduction**

There are two ways of looking at the Southern Flank of NATO, from the perspective of the main Western European countries. One is the "safety belt" approach. The other is the "overall stability" approach. Both recognize the great importance of the Mediterranean region for European security. The first one however is based on the assumption that this region is "crises prone", basically unmanageable without the direct intervention of the Superpowers, too risky and volatile for long-term policy commitments: the main objective of Europe therefore should be a "damage limitation" operation. The principle instrument of Mediterranean policy would be military force and the capacity to enforce an external will on the local powers.

The second one, on the contrary, is based on the idea that the basic instability of the Mediterranean region can be cured, that there is enough good will and political capacity inside the region to establish long-lasting and peaceful relationships, that a policy of stability can be based on the growing awareness of the existence of very important common interests between Mediterranean and European countries. The instruments of such policy would be more of an economic and political, rather than military, nature.

Not surprisingly, the first point of view is more common in Northern and Central Europe, while the second one is more or less shared by the Southern European countries.

The problem is that in order to try to implement their favourite strategy, the Southern countries need the cooperation of their allies, while the first strategy can be pursued, at least for a while (under some circumstances, for a very long while), disregarding the wishes of the Mediterranean countries.

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### *Political Factors affecting Cooperation*

No one of course would willingly choose the use of force when other ways are readily available. Still, there is a great difference between a policy of "consensus gathering" and a policy of "decision sharing". The first is in search of clients, the second of allies.

The Mediterranean is torn in between. Some countries, like Greece, Italy, Portugal, Spain and Turkey, are formally integrated within the Western system, from the Atlantic Alliance to the EEC, but their participation is frequently under scrutiny and criticism, while their influence and effectiveness is limited.

The policies of the Western powers towards the Mediterranean are similarly divided and contradictory, going in either direction according to the prevailing mood and expediencies.

The net result is a situation of growing confusion and instability. The question asked in this paper is if there is a chance for an initiative coming from the South, aimed at establishing a stable and positive relationship of security and stability between the Mediterranean and Europe.

#### **The Problem**

The Mediterranean area cannot be considered a homogeneous region. In the Mediterranean different political, religious, military and economic realities meet, sometimes in cooperation, sometimes in conflict. No single Mediterranean power is capable of imposing its will on the entire area, by the use of military force or otherwise. On the contrary, each Mediterranean country is a somewhat "junior" partner, in alliance with stronger powers. Local conflicts therefore are intertwined and mixed up with other international conflicts, larger and more important. The Mediterranean countries moreover are frequently interested in utilizing their alliances in order to strengthen their stance, to avoid any important concessions and to protract the local conflicts, until their freezing and their internationalization. All this creates a *balance of mutual impotence*.

No attempt to impose an external order on the Mediterranean is likely to succeed. Neither of the Superpowers, in the last forty years, has given the Mediterranean enough importance and priority and has invested enough resources to become its master. The problem of course is that the conflicts interesting the Mediterranean can only rarely be restricted to the riparian countries alone. On the contrary, they are generally bound to involve other countries and regions, to establish a kind of "domino escalation", practically impossible to fully control.

The division and confrontation between East and West has effectively frozen and put out of the political picture the traditional intra-European

conflicts. No such result has been achieved in the Mediterranean, where the borders between the two "blocks" are muddled and dubious, while the alliances are frail and changeable.

This situation favours the growing impact of multiple threats, affecting both the Mediterranean and the European countries. Between them, international terrorism is now prominent, but more traditional military, social and economic threats are also present.

Attempts have been made in the past, and are still being made, to deal with this problem in a multilateral and peaceful way. None of these attempts however has fully succeeded yet. The most successful one was probably the so-called Camp David process, in bringing peace between Israel and Egypt, with the help of the United States and the military guarantee of the Multilateral Force in the Sinai. This same approach however has dramatically failed in Lebanon, and did not expand to embrace the other Arab countries bordering with Israel.

No success whatsoever was possible for the interesting idea of a Conference on Security and Cooperation in the Mediterranean, modelled on the experience of the CSCE. Even the limited Mediterranean participation in the CSCE process has been characterized by a number of failures, or at best by irrelevance. There is now the idea, championed by the Italian Government, of the creation of a Euro-Mediterranean "support group" involving at least three NATO countries (Italy, France and Spain) and three non-aligned countries (Jugoslavia, Egypt and Algeria), all interested in strengthening the chances of peace and stability in the Mediterranean. But it is easy to foresee the important limits and weaknesses of such a project, should it be implemented. Political differences between its members, their relative impotence vis-a-vis the major powers present in the Mediterranean, the absence of important countries (such as Greece and Turkey, by the way, but also Morocco or Saudi Arabia), the vagueness of the political aims, are themselves enough to increase scepticism.

What is happening, on the contrary, is the creation of new linkages between "moderate" countries of the Arab world and European countries, on matters such as anti-terrorism cooperation, while some more "radical" countries are driven away from Europe and the West. This is not the result of a conscious "block policy" of the European powers, as the logical consequence of the aggravation of the Mediterranean conflicts and of the limited measures taken until now to circumscribe them.

The linkages created so far however are not strong enough to establish a new pattern of alliances and guarantees between European and Mediterranean countries. The divergencies existing among Europeans, and with the United States, on the best way to fight instability and counter the

threats coming from the Mediterranean, are weakening the present relationship. Even the European Community, the biggest economic power of the area and the main partner of all the Mediterranean countries, was unable to produce a coherent and effective policy towards these regions, in order to bring about at least a minimum of economic development and prosperity.

This is not to say that the Community's Mediterranean policy has been totally ineffective, but that its successes seem to be a thing of the past. The establishment of strong association ties with almost all the Mediterranean countries is of course an important accomplishment. The substantial help given to the democratic political forces in Greece, Portugal, Spain and Turkey, is still the greatest achievement of Western Europe in the last years. But the practical failure of the Euro-Arab dialogue, and the inability to envisage and implement a common security and foreign policy in the Mediterranean, are not likely to be overcome in the near future.

#### **A View from South-East**

The Southern Flank of NATO has its greatest weakness in the Eastern Mediterranean. This is particularly worrying for Italy. This country fears the possibility of becoming a "border country" between East and West. During a crisis the Mediterranean could easily be divided in two: the Western part, solidly controlled by the Atlantic Alliance, and the Eastern part, where such a control would be very uncertain and weak. Such a situation should worry first of all Greece and Turkey. These two countries risk isolation during the crisis, and cannot be certain that help from their allies will be prompt, important enough and unwavering.

To modify this situation, however, it would be necessary to substantially increase the integration and presence of the Western forces in the Eastern Mediterranean. Until today such a choice meant the increase of the American military presence in the Allied countries. Such a solution creates difficult internal political problems in all the European countries of the Southern Flank. Moreover, it is very unlikely that the United States themselves would agree to such a policy. The American Superpower has constantly diminished its permanent military presence in the Mediterranean during the last decade. The only increases made were temporary and motivated by the national American urgency to act in non-European crises, such as the defence of Israel or the "punishment" of Libya.

Greece and Turkey, nevertheless, play a key strategic role in the area. They control the major Soviet access routes to the Mediterranean. They are the only Western states present in the Balkans, and their existence and policies allow Yugoslavia, Albania and Rumania a greater freedom of manoeuvre with the Soviet Union. The political and strategic importance

of the Balkans cannot be underrated. In order to reinforce those countries, and increase their relationships with the West, great caution is required to avoid negative reactions from the Soviet side. The various attempts by Greece and Turkey to help to establish an area of integration and cooperation in the Balkans have had an important political function. For this policy to succeed, however, it would be necessary to have greater understanding and help from the West (and in particular from the EEC). The present economic and social crises of Yugoslavia, the problems of consolidation of the new leadership in Albania, even the future of the "autonomous foreign policy" of Rumania, require urgent consideration and local initiatives inside the Balkans. The normalization of the state relations between Athens and Tirana are a first positive step in this direction.

The recent agreement signed between Greece and Bulgaria, however, cannot be seen in the same light. The establishment of good relations and friendship between Athens and Sofia is certainly positive. On the other side, this Treaty between one Nato and one Warsaw Pact country can also create misgivings and problems. Generally speaking, a more ambitious policy in the Balkans cannot be based simply on a generic "rapprochement" between two countries, or in very vague "disarmament" plans (such as the plan for "denuclearization" of the entire peninsula). The first priority rests on the necessary reinforcement and insurance of the independent role of Yugoslavia and Albania: an objective that can be attained only through a strong cooperation and joint actions from the Western Countries of the Balkans and the EEC.

Geographically, Greece is well positioned to control the major "choke points" of the Eastern Mediterranean and, politically, it maintains good traditional relations with the Southern Mediterranean countries, while being a member of the Atlantic Alliance and the EEC.

Turkey occupies a key position in the Allied crescent around the USSR, and its geo-political location is essential to avoid the strategic welding between the USSR and the Middle East. Its traditional relations with Iran and Iraq moreover, while temporarily reduced in the present circumstances, remain potentially very important for the future stability of the entire area. However, it requires great attention and cooperation from the allies in order to help its government and its democratic political forces to defeat Islamic radical instances and many other internal destabilizing factors.

A closer cooperation between all the countries of the Southern Flank, and in particular between Greece, Italy and Turkey, inside the Alliance and in agreement with a new Mediterranean policy of the EEC, would bring about a significant strengthening of the West, while avoiding the negative effects of an increase of the American presence. To succeed, however, it would be necessary, first of all, to increase the confidence and cooperation between

Greece and Turkey.

This is not impossible. It happened in the past, and it will happen again in the future. I would like to recall here a positive experience of 1979, when cooperation between the Defence General Staffs of Greece, Italy and Turkey produced a common understanding and a joint evaluation of the threat in the Mediterranean. Unfortunately the experience was not repeated, even if the threat did not fade away. On the contrary...

The conflicts between Greece and Turkey are an objective element of weakness and disruption of the entire framework of Mediterranean stability. The simple existence of these conflicts are discouraging other countries and the international organizations from starting new important initiatives and reinforcing the "safety belt" thesis and the "damage limitation" approach. The persistence of a conflictual situation creates the risk of increasing the "marginalization" of both countries. The strong temptation felt in Athens and in Ankara, to take advantage of their strategic importance and their international relationships (especially in the EEC and in NATO), in order to foster their national positions, is gradually estranging the Allies from the Eastern Mediterranean. For a bird in the bush we are losing two in the hand.

Meanwhile, the Soviet Union is happily fishing in troubled waters. The increasing attention that Moscow is showing towards Cyprus, the friendly hand it extends in turn to Greece and to Turkey, the reinforcement of its military forces in the bordering regions, its growing political and military presence in some riparian countries, are a real threat for the future.

### **A Difficult Treatment**

A good treatment should not kill the patient. A number of the interventions of the past were in fact harmful, damaging the relationship between Allies and complicating the crisis management. The use of force and injunctions has not produced the desired results, and was sometimes counterproductive. The temptation of "quick fixes", be they technological or political, will be equally ineffective. Present technological advances cannot diminish the strategic importance and usefulness of these countries, and a sharp choice in favour of one will bring about the loss of the other, with no advantage whatsoever for the West.

A good treatment therefore should be based directly on the existing antibodies, on the acceptance and understanding of local perceptions, on the objective interests of the local actors. It should be a kind of omeopathic treatment.

We should ask ourselves whether it is right and useful that the United

Nations remains today the only international organization trying to reach some compromise and favour a negotiation on Cyprus. The justification of inaction from NATO or the EEC is based on the desire to avoid any explicit choice between the contenders. This absence is a clear indication of crisis. More dignity and courage are needed for the future. The intervention of the UN, by the way, is not a recipe for success: the previous experiences, from Korea to Lebanon, demonstrate their inability to deal with strong nationalistic ideologies, spoke by determined sponsors.

Any long-lasting solution is first and foremost a question of choosing the right methodology. The Europeans discovered a good methodology in the creation of supranational multilateral institutions, giving them the direct responsibility of managing both sides of the problem (as between France and West Germany, with the establishment of the Coal and Steel Community). These organizations have been able to overcome nationalistic feelings, or at least to create a common legal and political framework, accepted by all the interested parties. A similar approach could be put at work in the Eastern Mediterranean.

However, the supranational methodology requires the identification of common interests and a significant degree of confidence between parties. No solution in the real world can guarantee the complete success of only one of them. Insofar as the solution allows for modifications and evolutions, guided by the process of law and democracy, many compromises can be accepted that would appear impossible under other circumstances.

One of the most difficult problems lies in the sovereignty over the waters and the sea bed of the Aegean. No simple and straightforward solution can be found in the international law: it should be based on a compromise between the two parties. If from one side it is understandable that Greece would like to maintain a general continuity between the mainland and all its Aegean islands, on the other side the interests of Turkey (and of all the other naval powers interested in this line of transit) are against the transformation of the Sea in a kind of Greek lake. A good compromise could rest on the maintenance of the present equilibrium, without enlargement of the Greek or Turkish zone over the Aegean.

Presently the issue is drastically "bilateralized" between the two countries, while a more general common interest could be brought to bear, at least from the EEC and NATO. A similar "multilateralization" of the issues at stake could easily be tried as far as the problem of the militarization of the Islands and the application of the Lausanne and Montreux Conventions are concerned. Turkey and Greece are not the only interested parties, and a compromise could be more easily at hand if the other Western parties would agree in joining them in the negotiations.

### *Political Factors affecting Cooperation*

The European Community should logically expand toward Turkey and Cyprus, both European Associates of the EEC. This is a political necessity for the Mediterranean and a good thing for the overall stability of the continent. This enlargement will be practically impossible, however, should we not be able to manage the present situation of crisis. The first move cannot come from outside the area: it should come from within.

That is not to say that Greece has a veto power on the problem of Turkish entry into the EEC, or that Turkey can play on the European and American desire to strengthen its posture in order to dismiss any attempt to solve the Cyprus question. That is simply to say that any future solution will certainly require a big change of the agenda of the negotiations. Cyprus should become the logical and important appendix of a larger agreement on common interests and joint actions in the Eastern Mediterranean, agreed upon between all the local actors. No solutions can be found in "zero-sum" diplomatic or military games.

The EEC, and the involvement of the other Western European countries, can make the difference and change the sum for the necessary amount. No engagement from outside will be possible or forthcoming, however, without an initiative coming from the Mediterranean, particularly from the Eastern Mediterranean, and from our countries. Only these countries can underline the urgency of a common policy for the Eastern Mediterranean in the economic and security spheres, based on the European Community, the European political cooperation and, of course, a common European position inside the Atlantic Alliance. Such a policy could very well proliferate, and contribute to the strengthening of the present "Mediterranean network" between Europeans and moderate Arabs, while maintaining a sufficient modicum of necessary relations with the remaining "less moderate" states. But the first move will have to come from the South-Eastern tier of Western Europe with the help of their European allies.

The Eastern Mediterranean has clearly established its "nuisance value", as far as the West is concerned. This situation cannot be protracted without risks. It is easy to identify the policy initiatives that could transform the present "nuisance" (and risk) in a new "asset":

- the establishment of a better Mediterranean policy of the EEC, integrating both the Greeks and the Turks inside the European Community;
- a gradual solution to the Cyprus problem, through the integration of this country in a larger European context, where both Greeks and Turks can be regarded as a "minority", and through "objective" international guarantees to both Communities;

- the possibility of a stronger common European policy towards the Middle East, profiting from the geostrategic location of these countries and from their relationships with the area;
- the establishment of a better common system of Air Defence for the Southern Flank, the creation of a secure environment for the operations of the maritime forces of NATO, and the organization of a joint system of military back-up of the many weak spots of the South Eastern theatre.

These policies should be based both on the initiatives of the parties concerned and on the assistance and help from the outside. The United States however are no more interested in playing a very prominent role in the area. On the contrary, their present policy, sooner or later, could result in the creation of a real "vacuum" of political and military power. Initiatives of this kind could strongly influence Western perceptions of the Mediterranean, increasing the chances of the "overall stability" approach, and of filling the "vacuum". They need therefore courage and political decisions on the part of the EEC (and NATO) at least as much as on the part of Greece and Turkey themselves.