


## Chapter 4

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# Cyprus And Eastern Mediterranean in Greek Political Parties' Discourse During The 2010s



Zuhal Mert Uzuner, Assoc. Prof. Dr. 

*<sup>a</sup>Department of International Relations, Marmara University, Istanbul, Turkey*

\*Corresponding Author: Zuhal Mert Uzuner; zmert@marmara.edu.tr

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### **Abstract**

After 2010, new security concerns in Greek foreign policy arose as a result of escalating tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean as a subregion. Existing security concerns are amplified by new challenges that Greek domestic political actors see as difficult. Although security concerns, threats, risks, and interests are the result of governmental decision-making and domestic politics, the ongoing impact of previous issues must be revisited to understand how the new issues are interpreted. The Cyprus question has increased pressure on the thoughts of the primary decision-makers in Greek foreign policy, the prime ministers and foreign ministers. In this framework of decision-making processes, emerging new issues in the Eastern Mediterranean are seen as linked to the Cyprus question and other Greek-Turkish disputes. The purpose of this article is to assess the relationship between Greece's political leadership and the settled national foreign and security policy concerns in the Eastern Mediterranean surrounding the Cyprus issue in the 2010s. In this framework, the key political leaders' and parties' public speeches and preferred policies in the 2010s were examined to present the relationship between Greek domestic and foreign policies, as well as the impact of leadership, particularly in decisions about Greek-Turkish relations in Eastern Mediterranean and the Cyprus question.

*Keywords: Cyprus, Eastern Mediterranean, Greek Political Parties, Greek-Turkish Relations*

## 4.1. Introduction

Cyprus issue has been a 'national issue' for both Greek and Turkish nationalism and political leaders had to consider the public responses about Cyprus since the beginning of the ethnic violence on the island in the 1960s. Many governments from different ideological or political orientations ruled the countries but only a small room is left to politics for the radical manoeuvres to change national position. In the last two decades, rising rivalries in the delimitation of sea zones in the Eastern Mediterranean added new concerns to the existing disputes. It is hard to argue that the regional policies of Turkey and Greece are constructed around only the Cyprus problem; but surely, Cyprus has a great influence on the regional aspirations of all parties. In addition to the previous consideration of the Cyprus problem, the rising interest of global and regional actors in the region created new dynamics to be utilized by Greek foreign policy in the 2010s. So, what is the relationship of Cyprus question with the Eastern Mediterranean policy of Greece and how is it transformed with new factors? Is it possible to argue that the rise of the Eastern Mediterranean as a new political region fostered other concerns in Greek foreign policy? What are the new concerns? What is the relationship between the definition of the concerns with Greek domestic politics and the rise of different political actors? Answering these questions is possible with an analysis of the key political leaders' and parties' choices, and discourses in the 2010s. In this decade of economic crisis, the Greek political parties changed, and in addition to liberal right-wing New Democracy (ND) and socialist left-wing Panhellenic Socialist Party (PASOK), socialist SYRIZA, and other smaller parties emerged in search of alternative solutions. So, an analysis of different fractions' discourses in politics about the Eastern Mediterranean in the 2010s may present limits of the ideology and reforms to create alternative political priorities in the Greek foreign policy-making process.

## 4.2. Rise of the Eastern Mediterranean disagreements in Greek Turkish bilateral agenda in the 2010s

Eastern Mediterranean hydrocarbon resources started to be a matter at the beginning of the 2000s. Even during the Greek-Turkish rapprochement hydrocarbons were the subject of international politics, especially in the context of the Cyprus issue. European Union (EU) membership of the Republic of Cyprus (RoC), the failure of the Annan Plan, the decline of EU prospect of Turkey with vetoes of RoC and France on opening the negotiation chapters, and the economic crisis after 2008 in Greece and the RoC dominated the 2000s. Finding hydrocarbon energy resources around Cyprus together with the rising political and economic crisis triggered more anti-solution perspectives or less interest in Greek-Turkish disputes both with the hope to have all or with the fear of weakness of Greek politicians at the beginning of the 2010s.

By 2010, regional rivalries and polarization expanded with the rise of Arab springs and inflamed instability in the region (“Libya’daki NATO...”). Political turmoil, economic problems, radicalism, and continuous civil war in the region increased the flow of migration in 2011 (“International Migration...”) and created a humanitarian crisis together with several security problems. In this atmosphere, Eastern Mediterranean states started to cooperate by the creation of bilateral or trilateral alliances to address security concerns while Greek-Turkish relations in the Eastern Mediterranean are trapped by flaws stemming from the Cyprus question.

On the other hand, European countries’ search for alternative energy resources motivated the EU’s investment in the region. In 2013, the construction of the Eastern Mediterranean (EastMed) pipeline came onto the agenda of the European Commission with Regulation No. 347/2013 (Support to...). It was defined as a ‘Project of Common Interest’. For the construction of the project, the Commission contributed €34.5 million from 2015-to 2018. While this investment is positive for Greek considerations, Turkey as a non-member country started to have worries about probable European support for the Greek arguments. So, the Greek-Turkish disagreements are Europeanized more and more in the 2010s. In that frame, Greece and the RoC strongly utilized their membership to promote the idea that the interests of Athens and Nicosia are the interest of the EU.

EU's role has been destructive to the impact of energy in bilateral relations. It was possible to see the hopes about the positive impact of energy during the letter diplomacy between Papandreou and Erdogan in January 2010. These days created a positive atmosphere in bilateral relations because the letters were underlining the potential of Turkey and Greece for the creation of stability in their region ("Papandreou'nun Mektubu...", 2010). However, after the East-Med Pipeline Project, the atmosphere has changed with the sovereignty worries of both countries.

Because both countries had a strategic priority of being an energy transportation route and an energy hub, hydrocarbon resources created both areas of cooperation and competition between Greece and Turkey in the 2010s. Efforts to construct energy corridors through projects such as the Trans Anatolia Pipeline (TANAP) and Trans Adriatic Pipeline (TAP to transfer Russian gas to Italy through Turkey and Greece ("Erdoğan Samaras...", 2013) came together with competition about the extension of the Exclusive Economic Zones of the Eastern Mediterranean countries. Despite continuing High-Level Strategic Cooperation Council meetings between Greece and Turkey in the 2010s, both states used all probable platforms to create alliances against each other's relative positions. So, Greece tried to utilize rising tensions between Israel, the US, and Turkey in the 2010s while Russia started to be perceived as an alternative ally of Turkey. It is possible to see the same policy during the crises between Turkey and other regional and global actors such as the visit of the Russian naval ship to Alexandroupoli during the crisis in Syria, or the visits of Charles de Gaulle, the French aircraft carrier to Cyprus, increase in numbers of US-NATO bases in Souda, Crete, and permission to create a new US base in Alexandroupoli. So, the relations are perceived as a zero-sum game, especially in the Eastern Mediterranean. It is also obvious in the regional rapprochement of Turkey as the resolution of the tension between Turkey and Russia and increasing level of diplomatic connections with Israel are ("Değerli Yalnızlık ...", 2016) considered not so positive by the Greek officials.

The continuous flow of immigrants because of the Syrian civil war created another topic of cooperation and conflict in bilateral relations in the 2010s. As a transit route and the host country for the Syrians who fled from the war, Turkey should be supported according to the EU countries. Especially Germany strongly supported the idea of a migration deal with Turkey to stop the flow of migration. That started to be a strategic power in Turkish foreign policy. After three summits

(15 November 2015, 28 November 2015, and 18 March 2016) a Joint Action Plan against irregular migration was signed (“Mülteci Krizi:...”, 2020).

After the coup d’état attempt in Turkey on 15 July 2016, FETO asylum seekers in Greece created another serious erosion of trust in bilateral relations (Ifantis, 2018). After the release of Gulenist fugitives by the Greek court, Turkish officials decided to cease the readmission of the migrants from Greece (“Yunanistan’dan Türkiye’ye...”, 2018). In the following days, the detention of two Greek soldiers in March 2018 by Turkish authorities at the Maritsa River border and then the detention of Turkish soldiers by Greek authorities in September 2018 had been another source of tension between the two countries. Maritsa River border witnessed another tension during the decision of Turkish authorities to release control over the flow of immigrants in 2019. It was interesting that the migrants were only allowed towards the Greek border while the Bulgarian one remained silent.

Turkey’s military operations for security reasons on Turkey’s borders other than Greek-Turkish ones, such as *Operation Euphrates Shield* in Syria, were also a source of concern for Greece. It is followed by condemnations coming from European countries against the military operations of Turkey. The operations are considered proof of the “militarization of Turkish foreign policy” (Adar & Toygur, 2020). In addition to land operations, the increase of the influence of the Turkish Navy and prominent admirals on Turkey’s naval policy, starting from late 2016, became another source of worry for Greece. In 2018, the *Blue Homeland* doctrine started to be more vocal in Turkish Mediterranean policy. After the newly bought seismic exploration ship *Barbaros Hayrettin Pasa* (2012), Turkey bought three more drilling ships, *Fatih* (2017), *Yavuz* (2019), and *Kanuni* (2020) in addition to *Oruc Reis* (2015). Another source of contention is the names given to ships and military exercises by Greece and Turkey.

Turkey’s naval and military activism is problematic for Greece because it is viewed as a sign of revisionism of Turkey in its near abroad. This concern on revisionism was based on references to the ideological background of the Turkish government. The political Islamist Turkish government is unquestionably believed to be a sympathizer of radicalism in the region. This is also related to the history and identity of the Greeks. Islam is presented as an integral part of the definition of Turkish identity in Greece and that is enhanced through provoked enmities in mass

media and mass education throughout the years. However, anti-Islamic discourse in Greece is also connected with rising Islamophobia in European public opinion. In addition, it may be considered a strategy because radical Islamism is a source of terror and fear in the international community and calling Turkey a country under a radical Islamic government could erode its negotiation power. Through this discourse, the Greek government expected to take support of the international community against Turkish arguments in the region as a pillar of stability with shared norms and rules with the Western world.

After the 74<sup>th</sup> United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) meeting in September 2019, Erdoğan and Mitsotakis declared that they agree to regenerate the High-Level Cooperation Council between Greece and Turkey (“Erdoğan ile Mitsotakis...”, 2019). However, the EU mechanisms continued to be utilized for supporting the Greek national policies in that process because of the traditional Greek perspective, especially in the Cyprus question. Turkey’s drilling activities in the sea zone at the west of Cyprus exacerbated this perspective because the RoC considers that sea zone as a part of its territorial waters. Therefore, the RoC carried the issue to the EU on 11 November 2019 and asked framework for restrictive measures. On 27 February 2020. As a result of the meeting, a framework of restrictive measures was adopted on entities that were involved in “unauthorized drilling activities” and the EU imposed an asset freeze on two senior officials of the Turkish Petroleum Corporation (TPAO). This was later extended until 12 November 2021 with the European Council decision on 6 November 2020 (“EU Sanctions...”, 2020). Although it was not a sanction decision as expected by Athens, the Turkish government was very much disappointed as a candidate country and Erdoğan said that the membership negotiations may be halted.

A very significant turning point in the 2010s for Greek Eastern Mediterranean policy is the Memorandum signed between Turkey and Libya’s recognized Government of National Accord (GNA) on the 27<sup>th</sup> of November 2019 about maritime borders. This memorandum challenged the Greek arguments of EEZ and provoked a diplomatic race for Greece to sign counter agreements with the regional actors.

Memorandum is considered unlawful and non-existent by the Greek government not only because of the EEZ delimitation agreement but also because it offers a legal base for the military existence of Turkey in Libya. Greece, France, and

a few other European countries underlined the UN Security Council's decisions against the armament of the warring groups in Libya. The creation of Operation Iirini<sup>1</sup> and the realization of operation to a Turkish-flagged cargo vessel Roseline-A on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of November, 2020 ("Türk Dışışleri: Müdahale...", 2020) were the subsequent responses connected to the Greek perception. Because the memorandum has a part about military cooperation, Turkish military officials' visit to Libya and the military existence of Turkey in Libya were categorized as a foreign intervention with additional accusations of the existence of paramilitary groups sponsored by Turkey. Greek diplomacy invited regional actors to bloc Turkish activism in the region by abolishing the Libyan-Turkish Memorandum invalid. Subsequently, NATO started to be more active in the region after the memorandum ("NATO'nun Libya Politikasında...", 2020). NATO meeting on the 21st of December 2019 could not stop the increasing tension and on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of January 2020, East Med Pipeline Project is signed between Israel, RoC, and Greece with the support of the US.

US and NATO became key partners of the Greek governments in the 2010s. Even though anti-NATO and anti-US feelings are high among Greek Cypriots as inducers of the 1974 operation of Turkey, NATO membership of RoC was discussed in 2018 with the support of France and US officials (Damon, 2019).

2020 was also a difficult year for bilateral relations with the continuation of the flow of migration to the Evros border, NAVTEX diplomacy and collusion of frigates Kemal Reis and Limnos, wide range naval exercises, invitation of the US and Israel to Greece for construction and renewal of naval, air and land power bases dominated Greek-Turkish relations. However, these should be regarded as consequences of the Libya deal. Greece insists on the continuation of its EEZ with the Cypriot EEZ, while Turkey claims access to open seas without control of Greece.

Despite the scheduled restart of Exploratory Talks between Greece and Turkey and the ongoing conciliatory efforts of Germany, Greece signed an EEZ agreement with Egypt on the 7<sup>th</sup> of August. It was considered an intervention of the US into the process because, in the following days, the settlement of American soldiers and

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<sup>1</sup> Operation Eirini is a continuation of Operation Sofia which is designed as a response to migration issue. Operation Eirini is "a concrete demonstration of EU's support to the Berlin process" that is expanding role of the EU in Southeast Europe. Operation Eirini launched on 31 March 2020 (activated on 4 May 2020) with the purpose to stop transfer of arms with reference to UN's arms embargo <https://www.operationirini.eu/about-us/> and <https://www.operationirini.eu/libya-operation-irini-inspected-turkish-flagged-vessel/>.

equipment in Alexandroupoli is scheduled for August 2020. Turkey and Greece used NAVTEX diplomacy, and military exercises as part of their politics in 2021, too. Additional military arsenals were added to the Aegean islands with new bases of non-Aegean actors.

### 4.3. Greek politics in the 2010s and ideological orientations

Greek politics has several fault lines deriving from its history. Contemporary Greek politics is constructed after the 1974 Cyprus operation that brought an end to the military junta in Greece. In this period, left-wing politics has been legitimized and anti-NATO and anti-US feelings have arisen. Right-wing politics has been shaped by liberal economic policies and pro-Western and European-oriented preferences. In this process, New Democracy Party (ND) under Karamanlis and Mitsotakis families and Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) under the Papandreou family became dominant together with the Greek Communist Party (KKE) that has relatively lower voter support. Except for KKE, nationalism had a central place in political discourse and anti-Turkish feelings around Cyprus have been kept alive for decades with populist charismatic leadership.

Greek politics had several crises and shortages in this process because of corruption, clientelism, and patronage of populist politicians which are structural problems of Greek democracy. Sotiropoulos defines the problem as “low quality of democracy” (Sotiropoulos, 2017, p. 7). The Greek state was transformed into a big employer and the economy could not be productive. In this process, the European integration process offered an important opportunity for healing settled problems in the country. Both left and right-wing parties, and reformers with sympathy for Eurocommunists created hope for deep reforms. These hopes were interrupted by the populist and opportunist politicians who utilized nationalist discourse and fears.

Greek politicians could be categorized according to their ideological preferences and their prospects in political culture. Nikiforos Diamandouros argues that Greek political identity and culture that shape Greek foreign policy preferences are tightly related to widely shared traditional underdog culture, which is introvert, paternalistic, Eurosceptic, and protectionist. Against these tendencies, reformists always exist in Greek politics (Diamandouros, 1994). Greek sociology professor



Nikos Mouzelis (1992) also argues that the traditional culture is localist, introverted, xenophobic, and traditionalist and is against change. While traditionalists had always argued for Greek exceptionalism to explain challenging applications against the settled norms, reformists are more internationalists.

As in the previous decades, the traditionalist vs reformist struggle in Greek politics continued in the 2010s within the existing ideological spectrum of political parties from left to right. However, the failure of two main parties, PASOK and ND on the economy brought a search for alternatives in politics and the 2010s became an era of coalitions in Greece. Greek political life has been transformed and new parties emerged or were empowered in the 2010s as a response to the persistent problems of Greek political life.

The 2010s started with budget cuts, mass demonstrations, and general strikes in Greece. Reformist socialist leader Yorgos Papandreou became the Prime Minister of Greece after the 2009 general elections. Despite the demonstrations, he signed the Memorandum Agreement on May 5, 2010, with the Troika (ECB, EU, IMF) for resolving the sovereign debt crisis. Thus, the memorandum brought a series of austerity measures and structural adjustments. Greek political parties' positions about the memorandum and the crisis can be summarized as; PASOK and centre-right LAOS supported the memorandum, ND under the control of Samaras asked for an alternative package with the EU for austerity policies, and KKE asked once again for the exit from the eurozone and the EU, Coalition of the Radical Left-Progressive Alliance (SYRIZA) asked for the cancellation of the Memorandum and an alternative EU rescue policy, and Democratic Left (DIMAR) as a Eurocommunist split from SYRIZA was against austerity policies (Kousis & Kanellopoulos, 2014).

Rising reactions against the existing politicians and parties promoted inner opposition and divisions in all parties based on their preferences and proposals on austerity policies. The creation of new parties as fractions of the bigger ones has been promoted also by the low threshold of elections in Greece. Any party needs to receive 3 per cent to have a seat in the Greek Parliament-*Vouli*. Especially limitations of policymakers to produce alternative economic programs because of the Eurozone brought discussions about Grexit. During the 2012 election campaigns, the National Bank of Greece said that a eurozone exit "would lead to a significant drop in living standards for Greek citizens... Surveys show that 80 per cent of Greeks want to stay in the currency union as well" ("Greek Election a Referendum ...", 2012).

As a result of the national elections of May 6, 2012, ND and PASOK gathered on aggregate 32 per cent of the votes (ND 18.85 per cent and PASOK 13.18 per cent). LAOS lost seats with 2,9 per cent, “Independent Greeks” (ANEL), as a populist split of ND, took 10.61 per cent and a far-right neo-Nazi group Golden Dawn got 7 per cent of the votes (Election Results...). On left, DIMAR took 6.11 per cent, SYRIZA took 16.78 per cent, and KKE 8.48 per cent of the votes cast.

As no government could be formed, a new election was called and on June 17, 2012, SYRIZA increased its votes dramatically to 26.89 per cent, the other parties have the following vote percentages: ND 29.66, PASOK 12.28, ANEL 7.51, Golden Dawn 6.92, DIMAR 6.25, KKE 4.50. DIMAR, PASOK, and ND created the new government with Antonis Samaras’ Prime Ministry. The inner party splits created new political platforms, especially after the acceptance of Memorandums for austerity policy. Before the elections, in February 2012, Samaras decided to change the party policy to vote for the second memorandum and created that split for the emergence of ANEL with ND parliamentarians. ND’s propaganda posters were drawing a future for Greece in Europe with a promise to create a solution for the crisis while anti-austerity groups, such as SYRIZA was underlining austerity policy is pushing Greece into “hell”. Greek voters had still sympathy for the order and hoped may come with the support of the EU.

However, after two years of Samaras’ Prime Ministry in the ND-PASOK coalition government, the unemployment rate was dramatically high, and “a 40 per cent drop in purchasing power since the start of the crisis four years ago” was noticeable (Nielsen, 2014). During the 2014 municipal elections, alternative parties received higher votes. SYRIZA was underlining hope and the propaganda materials were about the arrival of hope for people with the government of SYRIZA.

SYRIZA-ANEL coalition was formed after the 2015 elections and the agenda of the Greek government was much more related to dealing with the Troika. The distribution of votes was as follows: 35.7 per cent went to SYRIZA, 29.9 per cent went to ND, 5 per cent went to PASOK, 3.6 per cent went to Independent Greeks-ANEL, 6.2 per cent went to Golden Dawn, 5.3 per cent went to KKE, 6.8 per cent went to pro-European centralist social liberal *Potami*-The River (Election Results...). In this process, Nikos Kotzias, Yorgos Katrougalos, and Alexis Tsipras dominated the foreign policy with a Eurocommunist and reformist perspective, especially after 2016. Rise of an anti-establishment far-right party Golden Dawn – *Chrysi Avgi* in

Greek politics in the 2015 parliament created concerns for democratic life in Greece because it was a racist, anti-immigrant, and anti-parliamentary party. However, the main theme of the parties was still the economic crisis and austerity measures, as the rise of populism with nationalist discourses provoked more and more traditionalist Eurosceptic approaches. Although Alexis Tsipras had anti-establishment discourses during the first six months of his government, he transformed into a political pragmatist as argued by many analysts (Koppa, 2019). Despite the discourses about the creation of a different European Union with more social rights, his signature of the memorandum despite the referenda results is considered a serious U-turn. There were several challenging steps of Tsipras against the traditionalists such as the Prespa Agreement with North Macedonia in 2018. As happened before, populist-nationalist traditionalists challenged the reformist internationalist perspective as weak on national issues.

2019 Greek parliamentary elections brought a single-party rule to Greece (Mylonas, 2019). Approximately 20 parties run in the 2019 elections and 6 of them entered the parliament. While Kyriakos Mitsotakis brought ND to government with 39.85 per cent of the vote and 158 seats in a 300-member parliament, former Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras received 31.53 per cent of the vote with his left-wing party SYRIZA. Declining pressure of the economic crisis and the success of the European liberal perspective about domestic and foreign concerns brought back the ND as a liberal pro-Western party to the government. Mitsotakis as a young dynamic leader figure created the required momentum for the party despite, he is not able to control all the fractions inside the ND. KINAL (Movement for Change), a reformed version of the once-dominant PASOK (Panhellenic Socialist Movement) came third under the leadership of Fofi Genimata. The Communist Party of Greece (KKE) came in fourth as a party with a stable share of the vote around 5 per cent. The other two parties that gained representation are the far-right party Greek Solution with 3.7 per cent and the left-leaning party MeRA25 under the leadership of Yannis Varoufakis with 3.44 per cent (“Election Results”).

It is possible to argue that the 2010s were the years of struggle for the economic well-being of the country and the result came with full integration into the Western economic institutional policies. However, it must be underlined that sceptics about the West and Europe were still powerful, especially concerning the feeling of injustice that emerged after the bad treatment of Greece during the crisis

is still alive.

To understand Greek politics, a Marxist analysis of Costas Lapavitsas shall be referred to, too. He defines the key characteristic of the Greek political parties in the 2010s as the victory of the historical bloc in Greece only except for the first SYRIZA government in 2015 (Lapavitsas, 2019). A historical bloc means, “an alliance of dominant sections of the capitalist class with lower classes, which plays a hegemonic role in the economy, politics, and culture of a country” as Gramsci defines it (Lapavitsas, 2019, p. 45). Sociological reflection of the Greek historical bloc came into existence following the EU membership of the country with big manufacturers/bankers and a media under their control. As a result of this structure, staying inside the European Monetary Union (EMU) became a priority in Greece. Largely criticized Troika and austerity policies in media exist together with this taboo. Lapavitsas (2019) argues that “From this perspective, it was a rational decision to accept the path of the bailouts and the attendant loss of sovereignty rather than risk profound social and political unrest” (p. 46). Euro is not only a currency but also a part of social and national identity. It is tightly connected with the European identity which provides an umbrella identity to overcome national divisions and is connected with modernity, thrust, and progress. Therefore, returning to the national currency Greek Drachma is perceived as a backward step (Lapavitsas, 2019). By 2016, Greece started to have stability, but still has several problems with exercising sovereignty on some policies.

#### 4.4. Eastern Mediterranean and Cyprus in public discourses of Greek political parties in the 2010s

It is not easy to analyse Greek foreign policy based on party ideology or preference because Greek governments were mostly coalitions in the 2010s. However, the leadership in the foreign ministry and defence ministry together with the prime minister may give important evidence to understand the impact of ideological orientation on decision-making and choices. In addition to the ideology, the abovementioned fault lines in Greek political culture shall be considered in this process as an important factor in foreign policy decision-making. Despite the divisions in politics, it is possible to argue that Turkey stayed as the most important source of threat and the Cyprus question as a national issue in Greek foreign policy

kept its central position and importance together with Greek interests in the Eastern Mediterranean in the 2010s.

At the beginning of the 2010s, Papandreou's legacy in Greek Turkish rapprochement was still alive. As a socialist reformist leader, he was underlining the peaceful resolution of the problems through dialogue but in official discourse, it was obvious that he articulated the traditional arguments. He could not take steps for issues other than an economic crisis. In the process of searching for a national unity government in Greece in 2011, right-wing nationalist liberal and pro-European Antonis Samaras became the Prime Minister of Greece. As in the government of Papandreou, Samaras term's foreign policy has been dominated by the Prime Minister. He worked first with traditionalist and prudent diplomat Petros Moliviatis and then, pro-European and reformist diplomat Dimitris Avromopoulos. Lastly, PASOK politician Evangelos Venizelos became the foreign minister of the Samaras government as a reformist and a rational leader. During this term, bilateral meetings and visits continued under the pressure of the economic crisis. However, the Greek traditional standpoint about the Cyprus question could be observed during the Erdoğan-Samaras meeting in 2014. Samaras said that Cyprus is an EU member, and the problem should be solved based on UNSC resolutions. What is meant by Samaras is recognition of the RoC as a legitimate government and the withdrawal of Turkish troops. A bizonal bicomunal federation is still possible, but equal sharing of sovereignty is not meant in his explanations. Erdoğan's answer was with the Turkish thesis depending on the two-states solution that underlines the need to recognize Turkish Cypriot authorities. Samaras says that it is obvious that we have a real problem and a real disagreement ("Erdoğan-Samaras görüşmesinde ...", 2014). Samaras was also tense about the Cyprus problem on 6 September 2014 during the NATO summit in Wales. Angelos Chryssogelos (2021) argues that in this period of economic crisis and coalition governments until 2019, foreign policymaking is not under the control of only the Greek Foreign Ministry (Chryssogelos, 2021, p. 734). Venizelos as the Foreign Minister had a mild political discourse in bilateral relations. He defended the need for resolution in the Mediterranean for the utilization of economic resources and he said later in 2020, an agreement with the neighbouring country Turkey is also possible as the EEZ agreement was signed with another neighbouring country, Italy. He said that,

time tends to reduce or even eliminate the economic and political importance

of fossil fuels as a natural and therefore economic and political object. Forty-seven years after the Metapolitefsi, we cannot have the same comfortable sense of time for the next 47 years. (Venizelos, 2022)

On the 15<sup>th</sup> of September 2014, Tsipras explained the program of SYRIZA in Thessaloniki (“Schedio Programmatikon...”, 2021) and after 2015 January SYRIZA-ANEL coalition came into power. Nikos Kotzias as an IR scholar took the control of the Greek Foreign Ministry. In his book published in 2010, Kotzias started the chapter about Greek-Turkish relations with an argument: Greek Turkish relations are the most important part of Greek foreign policy (Kotzias, 2010). Greece underlined the need to recognize the RoC as a “normal state” of the EU starting from 2015, which means sovereign and equal, but under occupation. During his term, Cyprus negotiations were promising, given the process before and during the Crans-Montana Summit on 29 June 2017. Unfortunately, the summer came to an end with a sudden escalation of tension in Greek-Turkish relations. Greek Cypriot side was not ready and the Greek Foreign Minister was so negative about the negotiations and keen to stop any kind of negotiation referring to the guaranty of Turkey (“Our View: Kotzias’ ...”, 2017).

In the same year, during the Erdoğan visit to Athens and Komotini together with Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras on the 8<sup>th</sup> of December, there were several tense conversations in front of the media. Subsequently, at the end of 2017, Erdoğan asked to revise some of the articles of the Lausanne Peace Treaty such as the articles regulating the rights of the minorities (Papachellas, 2017). Greek President Pavlopoulos answered,

The Treaty of Lausanne defines the territory and the sovereignty of Greece, and of the European Union, and this treaty is non-negotiable. It has no flaws, it does not need to be reviewed, or updated. (Smith, 2017, para. 5)

The tense atmosphere during the visit continued about Erdoğan’s references to the fugitives after the 15 July coup d’état attempt and protection of Ottoman heritage in Greek lands. Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras’ answer was,

Differences have always existed and [they exist] today. It is important ... that we express our disagreements in a constructive way, without being provocative. (Smith, 2017, para. 13)

Kotzias’ term was full of references to the security and order triangles created

by Greece, such as the RoC-Egypt-Israel agreement on hydrocarbons against the “regional threat” of Turkey (Aggelidis, 201). Starting in 2014, Greek and Cypriot policy in the region was constructed around the exclusion of Turkey and the construction of alliances against it with a new concept, the Southeastern Mediterranean, including Egypt, Cyprus, and Israel (Giannakopoulou, 2014). It is hard to argue that Kotsias kept the reformist way of rational policymaking. This process of exclusion was against the target of the process of EuroMed project started with the Barcelona Declaration in 1995 to create the Mediterranean as a pool of cooperation (Kontou, 2018). Although in many multilateral summits, such as the Rhodes Summit in 2017, inclusive negotiations of all the relevant actors are recognized repeatedly as the only method of resolution, small group summits as trilateral coalitions continued to be organized mostly based on the sense of anti-Turkey alliance. It is possible to argue that Tsipras and Kotsias were sensitive about the protection of the official position of the Greek state.

After the governmental change in Athens in July 2019, the new Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Greece started to be very active in Eastern Mediterranean politics. Greek Foreign Minister Dendias’ speeches about Greece’s active policies through trilateral and quadrilateral meetings provoked the explanations of previous Foreign Minister Nikos Kotsias. Kotsias accused his successor through his tweeter account of retaining all the success of making Cyprus a normal state in the eyes of international society and creating international networks to promote Greek arguments.

Especially after the 2019 Libyan-Turkish Memorandum, the Greek government has been criticized and the liberal approaches of Mitsotakis and the advisors coming from reformist tradition in Greek politics had been the target of public discussions and considered too modest. Mitsotakis’ team for foreign affairs with advisors such as international law professor Prof. Christos Rozakis and international relations professor Thanos Dokos from liberal NGO, ELIAMEP were under attack by traditionalist forces from opposition and fractions in ND. While Rozakis challenged the popular arguments on Greek TV programs about the Greek Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), Thanos Dokos as a pro-western liberal academician was arguing that Greece should go to the Hague for the resolution of the problems that are recognized by both states (Berberakis, 2020). These comments were utilized by the opposition against Mitsotakis. However, reformers became always

the real power of Greek foreign policy with their search to extravert Greek foreign policy. In 2011, Dokos was writing about the rise of the international diplomatic power of Cyprus issue together with the transformation of Cyprus into an energy hub and the probability of having the strong support of global actors for Greece in regional competition with Turkey (Dokos, 2011).

In Mitsotakis' government, as a more traditionalist figure, Dendias presents another style. For example, during a press conference of Turkish and Greek foreign ministers after an official visit to Ankara, Greek Foreign Minister Nikos Dendias' outrageous style of explanations in front of the media was considered a reflection of the domestic concerns of Greek politics. Public discussions about the existing leadership were accusing them of not having enough courage to defend Greek rights against Turks ("Greek and Turkish Foreign Ministers Trade...", 2021). After the Greek-Egyptian deal in August, 2020 former Foreign Minister Nikos Kotzias in the SYRIZA government said that,

Egypt did not divide EEZ between equal parts but it took 55% and gave Greece 45%. This approach in a sense is close to what Turkey sought. (Durul, 2020, para. 5)

However, Dendias' clear challenge during the press conference in Ankara on 16 April 2021, created an image of a brave politician declaring Greek interests in Ankara. Dendias said that,

Turkey has violated in the Aegean and the Eastern Mediterranean the international law and the [international] convention of the sea and the very sovereign rights of Greece, Turkey has carried out 400 flights over Greek soil. ("Greek and Turkish Foreign Ministers Clash...", 2021, para. 7)

He got support from both the public opinion, party fractions in ND, and some other opposition party leaders. Especially Antonis Samaras flank of ND was criticizing regeneration of exploratory talks. For example, in an interview with the Greek newspaper Kathimerini, Samaras said that,

You do not appease the expansionist. That way he becomes even more ruthless. ... There is no discussion for Greece other than the delimitation of the continental shelf and the exclusive economic zone. However, starting exploratory contacts rules out any discussion on sanctions against Turkey. Everyone understands that the international community does not "punish" a



country when it is formally in negotiations (Papantonio, 2021, para. 7).

Greek government's interests in being a regional strategic player started to be much more obvious by 2021 together with "all-time high" relations with the US and EU partners such as France. At the centre of this search for a new Greek strategic thinking, an old concern of Greek foreign policy exists; Turkey (Gorvett, 2021). The strategic role of Greece is defined as the main pillar of stability and cooperation in the Eastern Mediterranean. Greek borders together with Cyprus are considered as borders of not only the EU but also European security, democracy, and law ("O Geopolitikos Rolos...", 2020). Especially the argument of the Mitsotakis government and all official explanations refers to the 1982 United Nations Convention of the Law of the Seas (UNCLOS) which emphasizes the full impact and rights of islands in the delimitation of EEZ. For example, after the 14th Plenary Session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean on 20 February 2020 held in Athens, Constantine Tassoulas says that Greece is a signatory country of the UNCLOS as opposed to Turkey and Turkey does not want to respect international law for the weakening of Turkey's position (Fitsilis & Stavridis, 2021). It is so common in Greek political discourse to consider being a non-signatory country as a challenger to international law, even though the international law creates obligations on signatory countries and sovereign states have the right to accept or reject signing an agreement.

As a final note, it can be important to refer to KKE's position in the 2010s. During all discussions between the governmental parties, KKE has always presented an anti-US and anti-imperialist, anti-capitalist discourse about Greek foreign policy. During the 2010s, KKE is very sceptical about the austerity policies and problems of the capitalist order. In his speeches, Dimitris Koutsoumpas, the general secretary of the KKE, is always sceptical about European institutions, such as Hague and he says that the only way to solve the problem is through bilateral negotiations according to international law ("Koutsoumpas gia polemiki ...", 2020). He criticized the cooperation of the SYRIZA and ND with the US, NATO, and bourgeoisie institutions regarding the security of Greece against Turkey. He also criticized the high level of military expenditures at the expense of people's low level of salaries and lack of social services. On the other hand, he criticized Turkey for acting unilaterally and argued during his speech in Alexandroupoli in 2020 summer that Turkey's level of threat to Evros and Thrace had increased after the "non-existent" and

“unacceptable” Libyan memorandum. He said that Turkey’s bourgeoisie,

is seeking to change the borders in the wider region and that is why even in Athens, on the 17th of December, Erdoğan, at the invitation of Tsipras, seized the opportunity to raise the issue of revising the Lausanne Treaty. (“Koutsoumpas: I Tourkia...”, 2020, para. 2).

## 4.5. Conclusion

Greek foreign policy in the 2010s mostly stayed under the shadow of economic crisis and loose governmental structures because of coalition governments. As a continuation of the previous decades, Greece continued to refer to the Turkish threat as the central concept of Greek security. The EU membership and other trilateral cooperation platforms were utilized by the Greek foreign ministry to enhance the Greek EEZ and continental shelf arguments. It is possible to argue that in the 2010s Greek foreign policy’s leading concern in the Eastern Mediterranean remained to be the Cyprus question and Turkey’s worsening bilateral relations with global and regional actors were utilized to strengthen the Greek standpoint, especially about the Cyprus question. In addition, new dimensions in the Cyprus policy of Greek foreign policy emerged such as becoming an energy route and hub, especially in the context of EU integration and solidarity.

Greek political parties were eager to utilize the intellectual capacity of reformers to redeem themselves from the crisis which was mostly a consequence of irrational political order of clientelism and mismanagement of traditionalist underdog culture. As such, the reformists stayed around the governmental circles in important administrative positions to control and address austerity measures and more integration with the EU. With efforts of internationalist reformists, the EU mechanisms were utilized to enhance national policy in the 2010s with references to the three pillars: Promotion of Cyprus islands’ rights as a whole concerning the internationally recognized sole government legal status of the RoC, Greek islands’ full impact for delimitation of EEZ and search for uninterrupted continuity and connection between the sea zones of Greece and search for support to expand Cyprus’ and Greece’s maritime zones as European maritime zone. However, because of scepticism deriving from traditionalist introverts and nationalistic culture, the potential to bloc rational decision making especially about the Turkish threat still

exists. It is also important to refer to the continuation of low democracy standards with clientelism and a low level of transparency. Therefore, in the 2010s, Greek foreign policy during the different governments under different leadership profiles had been criticized for being weak and cautious. Because of these limitations, Greek reformist leaders in all political parties still have difficulties in resolution of bilateral problems with Turkey.

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