

HISTORICAL AND POLITICAL CONFLICT BETWEEN GREECE AND TURKEY

Relationships between Greece and Turkey have always been marked by an alternation of hostility periods and reconciliation periods. From the occupation of the Ottoman Empire, the sharing of the lands after its fall until economic and geopolitical issues to this day, conflicts seem still to persist.

The aim is to try to understand the how and why, from the situation of the past which might have led to the situation now. Only a tiny fraction of centuries of history is being told. This is not a history class and it has not been written by a professor or a historian. This is just a small article written from the point of view of a young European adult neither Greek, nor Turkish, trying to better understand the origins of a “conflict” between two countries with so many similarities.

From the creation of the Ottoman Empire until Greece independence (1299 – 1832)

The Ottoman Empire was founded in 1299 in the North-West of Anatolia (current Turkey). All over the years, it has conquered and controlled many countries in North Africa, Asia and Europe, Greece included. It became a multinational and multilingual Empire with Constantinople as a capital.



Territories of the Ottoman Empire in its greatest expansion

During the occupation, non-Muslim and so Greek people had to pay a bill, the *kharâj* or *haraç*, but it was less expensive than during the Byzantine era. It was not mandatory for Greek to be Muslim but a lot of them reverted for economic reasons. Besides, they did not take part in the Army except 1 son in each family. A lot of Greek tried to oppose these laws in vain.

Thus, the presence of the Ottomans in Greece led to important migratory movements by Greek people who were running away from the invaders. New villages were built, often high in the mountains and in inhabited places in order to hide. Intellectuals also moved from Greece to Western Europe.

In the middle of the XVIII century, Greek migrants who went to Western Europe were influenced by the ideas of the Enlightenment which were little by little spread in Greece awakening the national feeling of the State. Thus, the

popular discontent, the national spirit, the growing economy of Greek, all of this added to the help of Russia, France and UK lead Greek people to be confident enough to fight for their freedom in 1821 during almost a decade. The creation of a Greek State was finally established with a last treaty in 1832.

The aim of Western countries was not really to help Greek people but only to replace the Ottoman Empire in order to gain some territories as well, have a notable influence and after occupying countries such as Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt and colonize as well.

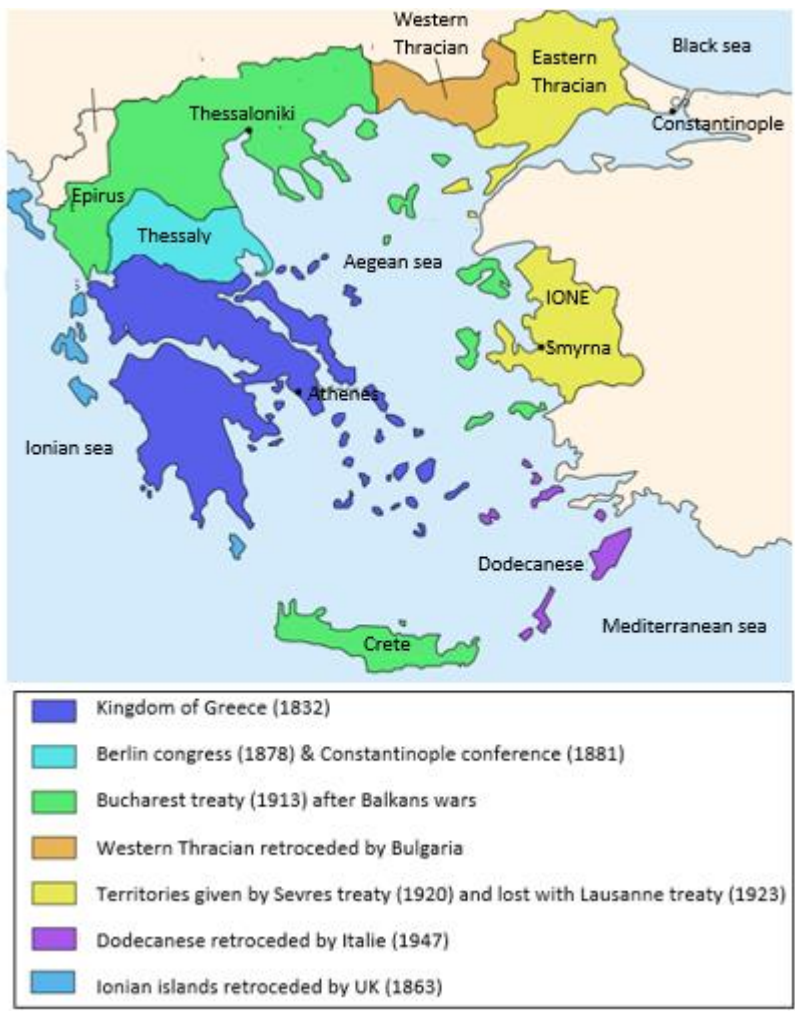
Fall of the Ottoman Empire and sharing of the lands (1830 - 1923)

The Ottoman Empire came through a lot of military defeats and lost a lot of territories at the end of the XVIII century which led it to have an alliance with Germany before the First World War, trying to escape from diplomatic isolation. Thus, it got engaged in World War 1 with Germany but lost this war.

The day after the First World War, the Ottoman Empire lost almost all its territories now divided between France and the UK. The treaty of Sevres, signed in 1920, was established to divide the territories of the Ottoman Empire between France, UK, Italie and even Greece. Initially in this treaty, the kingdom of Greece would have been constituted by the current Greece, eastern Thracian and Smirne region, two regions where Greek and Turkish people were living all together. Greek soldiers landed in Turkish territory even before the treaty was signed.

This treaty was considered as a humiliation and the Sultan, by signing it, lost all its legitimacy with the population and the Army. A second political power, led by Mustafa Kemal, was created and Turkish forces fought against Greek forces that were occupying Smirne region, Eastern Thracian and some islands. The conflict ended with a victory of Turkish army which canceled the treaty of Sevres, replaced by the treaty of Lausanne in 1923. Greece left all its territorial gains from 1920, except most of the islands in Aegean Sea.

Territorial expansion of Greece (1932 – 1947)



Moreover, people from current Turkey and current Greece had to move to assure a religious homogeneity in the newly formed countries. A tragic exchange of population began between the two countries: around 1.500.000 Greek people from Turkey and 500.000 Turkish people from Greece have been driven out of their homes.

Thus, with the defeat of Greece and those deportations, the Greek presence in Anatolia (previous Turkey) ended. Atrocities committed by Turkish army but also by Greek army during its occupation in Anatolia remained in the minds.

Economic and geopolitical conflict (1923 – now)

After the War, the leaders of Greece and Turkey were determined to establish normal relationships between the two States. Treaties are signed and Greece gives up all its claims in the Turkish territory. Despite all this willingness to improve and keep a good diplomatic relationship, some problems persisted and still persist now.

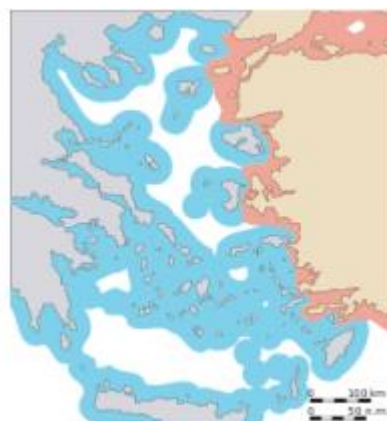
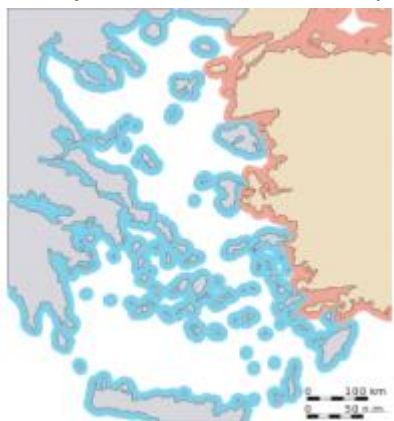
Cyprus crises

The main conflict between Greece and Turkey after the 50s was about Cyprus. Cyprus became independent and its population was shared between Greek and Turkish people. During the dictatorship in Greece, a lot of political opponents went to hide in Cyprus and in 1974, the National Guard led by Greek officers tried a coup against the Cypriot president and obtained the power by force. Their aim was the unification of Cyprus with Greece. Turkey intervened militarily for the protection of the interests of Turkish community of the island and the restoration of order. After that, the island was divided into two distinct entities – the North with a majority of Turkish people and the South with a majority of Greek people - and separated by “The Green Line” whose aim is to maintain peace in the region.

Conflict in Aegean Sea

New problems appear between the two countries about the sovereignty rights in the Aegean Sea. Greece obtained all the islands in the Sea – except Imbros and Tenedos – and some of them are located only a few kilometers away from Turkey. Until today, the problem of some control zones is still unresolved. Greece wants to extend the width of its territorial waters in the Aegean Sea but Turkey, which considers this as an unfair decision, threatened Greece in any case it tries to apply this law unilaterally. In 2020, Turkey entered Greek waters to conduct gas research and this caused maximum tension in Greece.

Current possession of Greece (blue) and Turkey (red) in the Aegean Sea



Territorial waters with the extension that Greece wants

The problem is also extended to the air: the two countries do not agree on the width of the nation's air space. Turkish aviation regularly flies in areas where Greece demands control while the Greek air force constantly intercepts them. In January 2021, Greece bought to France 18 Rafale fighter jets for 2.5 billion euros while its country might face another crisis after the coronavirus pandemic which affected the economy a lot.

🚩 Question of refugees

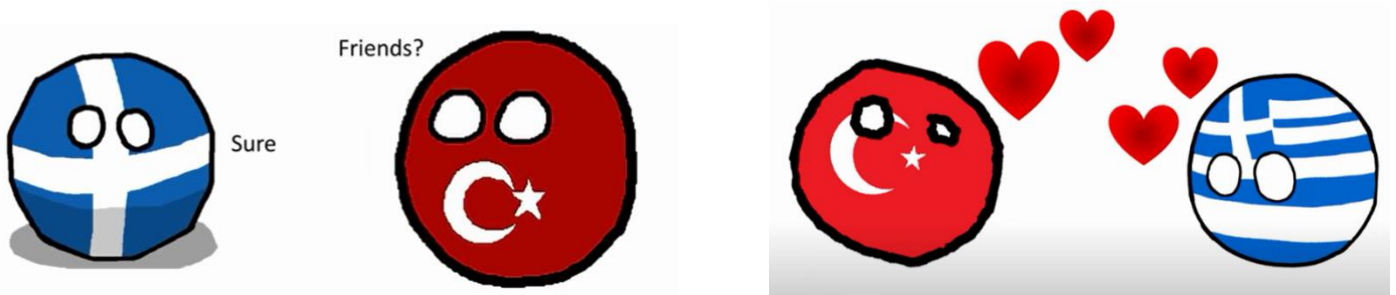
The problems and incidents concerning “clandestine immigration” are very frequent in the borders of Greece and Turkey. Turkey is a crossing point for migrants who want to reach Europe. The borders were closed since 2016 but the situation now is different: Turkey cannot handle anymore the many refugees in its territory and announced in February 2020 that they would no longer prevent refugees from attempting to cross its borders into Europe. Greece reacted by using many inhuman measures which go against European and international Law. A lot of refugees are now stuck in the border between Greece and Turkey waiting to enter Europe and for their case to be examined.

In the beginning of June 2021, Greece announced that it would recognize Turkey as a safe country for asylum seekers coming from Syria, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Somalia. Thus, these refugees coming to Greece, passing by Turkey, will be sent back and their asylum application will be ruled inadmissible.

And so?

Despite all the wars from the past during the Ottoman Empire time, the problems that appeared after played a big role in the evolution of the relationships between the two countries. Some of them are out of control, without mentioning the involvement of Western countries, since the dawn of time, for their own benefit.

Those problems concern mainly the governments but regardless, it is two amazing countries with so many similarities in their culture: gastronomy, music, architecture and really warm people. The average citizens love each other - without including extremely nationalistic politicians - and the two countries try as best as they can to improve their economic and commercial relationships.



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