

Answers by Prof. I. Th. Mazis on the questions by Dr. Alper Kaliber, Univ. of Birmirgham, U.K.

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1. What are the Greek security concerns in relation to the Cyprus problem in military and political terms?

A democratic European Turkey, that endorses the *acquis communautaire* and the European political culture as that has evolved over the last 50 years is not considered by Greece as a security threat.

However, certain forms of conduct on the part of our neighbour and NATO ally cause serious concern to Athens and the Greek people, which determines the approach of the Greek government towards Greek-Turkish relations. The democratic regime of European and NATO-member Greece makes provision for to the Greek people to have their say. The high standard of education and culture enjoyed by the Greek people allows for awareness of Turkish conduct and their views on these are conveyed to the Greek Government.. In a few words, these views acts as pressure on Greek governments vis-à-vis political evaluations and reactions in terms of improving Greek-Turkish relations. The issues of prime importance to a large part of the Greek people and the political spectrum as a whole are the following:

i. The Greek people have serious concerns about Turkey's conduct, which transcend the provisions of the Lausanne Treaty, the International Law of the Sea and the UN resolutions regarding the legal issue of the Invasion and occupation of the northern part of the Republic of Cyprus by the Turkish Armed Forces.

ii. The Greek people have serious concerns about Turkey's political behaviour, regarding its refusal to respond to severe humanitarian issues, such as the issues of the 1519 missing Greek-Cypriots as a result of the invasion of the island in 1974.

iii. The Greek people have serious concerns about Turkey's refusal to honour its signature regarding the Ankara Protocol, and to allow the free use of Turkish ports and airports by mercantile vessels and civil aircraft of the Republic of Cyprus.

iv. The Greek people have serious concerns about Turkey's refusal to withdraw its occupation troops from the Northern Part of the Republic of Cyprus.

v. The Greek People finds it difficult to explain the denial of an EU candidate to recognise a full member-state of the EU, by whom Turkey aspires to be accepted.

All the above and additional issues of a financial and legal nature hinder the initiatives taken by Athens, and lead to and add to its concerns regarding Ankara's behaviour on the issue of the Republic of Cyprus, an EU member-state. Reasonably enough, Athens considers that such geopolitical approaches by Ankara deviate from European standards of political behaviour.

2) To what extent does Turkey constitute a threat to Greek interests in Cyprus?

This question is answered above. (1).

3) Do you think the real threat to Greece is Turkey itself?

Definitely not.

i) The regional threats bear the stamp of Islamic paramilitary radicalism, either in its Sunni (salafistic), or its Shiite dimension.

ii) As for Turkey in particular, there is the actual danger of Kurdish separatist tendencies and the Kurdish terrorist movement, whether named: P.K.K. or Kongra Gel. Should I not acknowledge it, I wouldn't be an objective observer.

Regarding point (i):

It must be stressed that the danger of an “Islamic aberration» could move Turkey into the sphere of “instability factors” in the wider region of the Middle East and would force Turkey to postpone all efforts of modernisation towards Europe. For that reason, Greece remains the most loyal and sincere supporter of Turkey on the latter’s European future. A European Turkey poses no threat to Greece, nor- in particular - to Turkey itself. A European Turkey can be a strong factor for development, prosperity and stability in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Balkans, and a valuable partner for Greece and Europe. Moreover, it will act as a beacon for the rest of the wider Middle Eastern countries, proving that Islam, as a religion and a personal, spiritual belief of each follower, is no threat, but a factor for prosperity, peace and progress. Distorting Islam into a political and paramilitary-revolutionary practice, endangers regional security.

Therefore, Turkey finds itself confronted by a charming challenge, that countries are rarely called to face worldwide: Turkey is on called to prove that “Turkish Islam” is a rôle-model and a stability factor, and to undertake a suitable guiding rôle for the rest of the regional Islamic countries. If it achieves this, Turkey will turn into a valuable catalytic player for international peace and security and thus receive appropriate benefits in terms of international prestige and the domestic prosperity of its people. This is exactly where Turkish efforts are needed on the road of releasing the democratic aspects of Islam and implementing them on a “model Turkish society”.

Regarding point (ii):

There is no “terrorist behaviour” in the peaceful conduct of claiming civil rights and cultural freedoms by the Kurdish minority in Turkey, if executed by political means and democratic processes within the intra-national framework and with no projection of separatist tendencies under the aegis of the Turkish Republic.

The justifiable agony of the Turkish Republic regarding the activities of terrorist organisations must not turn into an instrument to suppress democratic freedoms and the rights of ethno-religious minorities, rights such as the free use and teaching of any minority language, preserving the unobstructed exercise of one’s religious duties, public expression

via the media using the said language etc.; otherwise, the Turkish Republic's credibility will be lost, even on issues where it is absolutely right and where the state has the very right to use repressive methods.

Conclusion:

Therefore, the “anxiety” of certain Turkish “élites” on handling both these issues prepares the ground for “hasty” and “unfortunate” undertakings vis-à-vis its neighbors, mostly Greece and the Republic of Cyprus. The said “anxiety” is, in my opinion, a prerequisite for these “élites” of the Turkish political and social system to perpetuate the absolute power of their intervention in the Turkish political-economical system; that is, in the overall superstructure of power. In no case, however, can this “anxiety” become the political vision of a historical, intelligent and productive people, such as the Turkish people are.

And here we have to wonder: What is Turkey? The European answer is one and only: Turkey is its people and its political expression by means of democratic methods. I believe that there are no people who prefer conflicts, bloodshed, insecurity and economic deprivation over growth and social prosperity. And this is where any kind of solution must be sought.

So, I repeat: no, Turkey is no danger “by itself”.

4. Can Turkey be a reliable partner to build a new security régime in the Aegean and the Eastern Mediterranean?

As it is apparent in my answer to question (3) above, it depends on the kind of “Turkey” we are talking about; a Turkey that has correctly assessed its European future and invested politically on it, in a completely reliable and valuable partner; even more - I would say- a key player in the geopolitical subsystem of the Eastern Mediterranean.

5. How is the Cyprus issue represented in Greek domestic political discourse? How is it understood?

i) My answer will be short and crystal clear: a potential adverse development (as perceived by the Greek people) on the Cyprus issue may utterly destroy all political figures and governments involved in a very short time. It would be useful to consider the current stance of the Greek (digital and printed) press on the Annan Plan and the possible victory of Tassos Papadopoulos in the forthcoming elections in the Republic of Cyprus.

This issue is projected a) in terms of human rights and freedoms, b) in relation to the extent Turkey can fulfill the challenge of its European course, c) primarily as a Euro-Turkish issue, as well as an issue between the Turkish Republic and the Republic of Cyprus; hardly ever is it presented as an issue between Greek-Cypriots and Turkish-Cypriots, since there is a belief that *“if freed by external players (that is, Turkey, the UK and the USA), both communities could certainly work this out by themselves much better”*. It is true that Greece does not get involved in the decisions of the Republic of Cyprus to the extent of stirring domestic opinion on its “phobia” in dealing with this issue. I would say that it’s not a matter of “phobia”, but a purely democratic perception of things that can be condensed in the existing Greek doctrine of “Cypriot policy”: *“Cyprus decides and Greece provides support”*.

ii) I could say that “Yes, Greek political discourse takes full account of the issue”, being at the same time critical of Greek and Greek-Cypriot “mistakes” on certain undertakings by the Greek side. I would say that the above is common knowledge, if one considers the debate that has developed in Greece over the past 2 years on a) whether or not to accept the Annan Plan and b) the accession of the Republic of Cyprus to full EU membership.

6. What is the role of civil society and the media in disseminating official security concerns?

[Answered]

7. What do you think are Turkey's main objectives in the Cyprus dispute?

First, I cannot understand in what way a peaceful, European and small country like Greece (e.g.: the total Greek population equals that of Constantinople alone!) could constitute a "strategic military threat" for a country like Turkey! How is that possible?!

So, I reckon it is, mainly, an issue of -ill perceived- prestige on behalf of a "certain élite" wishing to project such achievements, e.g. the occupation of the northern part of the Republic of Cyprus, in order to cement arguments that could ensure its long-lasting grip on "true power" within the framework of the Turkish Republic.

The recent elections showed that the Turkish people have little interest in such achievements and desire a true shift towards democracy and political transparency in its state. The future will show and prove many aspects of the new course towards democracy of the Turkish Republic, which we all hope to have been launched this autumn 2007.

From this point onwards, it is clear that an economically, politically and socially prosperous Republic of Turkey could become nothing less than a bridge of cooperation, security and financial prosperity between the dipole Greece-Turkey and all the countries of the Middle East and the EU.

Obviously, I can see no other objectives for today's Turkey, which can be interpreted with a strict Aristotelian or at least Cartesian logic. Besides, the Cold War has ended and the Republic of Cyprus is no "lair for exporting Islamistic terrorism" or other kind of terrorism, but a prosperous - at least as per its free half- EU member-state.

It also clear that it's not easy to for me to resort to "conspiracy theories" in order to provide different, much more "charming" replies and interpretations.

8. Do you think that i) the EU can intervene in the issue as a de-securitising and trust-building agent? ii) Does the EU have enough instruments and incentives to achieve the aim of building trust and peace between the two Cypriot communities? iii) Or does its involvement in the Cyprus issue create new problems and insecurities for the dispute?

It is absolutely clear that I am affirmative on both (i) and (ii) of your sub-queries. It would seem to me utterly irrational for Turkey not to believe the same, because, otherwise, how could I explain its behaviour? How could Turkey be willing to enter the EU, allegedly “producer of instability, trouble and insecurity” on important issues for Turkey, such as the Cyprus issue?! Such political conduct would be suicidal and I don’t think that post-1923 Turkish history has been suicidal! If, however, Turkey considers its accession to the European family as beneficial, then it has no alternative but to trust this choice and the EU itself, and all European political and legal institutions.

2. What are the implications of the Cyprus question for European security?

If we accept that the Cyprus issue is detrimental to the European security framework, then Turkish policy on that issue cannot be defined as successful. This is made clear by two facts that leave no room for contradictions, doubts or further comment:

i) The two full EU member-states are Greece and the Republic of Cyprus, “with the exception ” of the northern part (occupied by Turkish, and not Turkish Cypriot, troops) until it fulfils the *acquis communautaire*.

ii) The Republic of Cyprus has become a member of the EU despite the 30-year stagnation in resolving the Cyprus issue, of which European bodies and the predominant European countries, e.g. France, Germany and the UK, have been fully aware.

There is also a third event, more important in terms of “hard military security” for the EU, as well as the USA: The crucial contribution of the Republic of Cyprus vis-à-vis the humanitarian Armageddon, caused by the “asymmetric war” between Israel and Hezbollah in summer 2006; that contribution has been praised by all those who were quick to provide humanitarian assistance: the UN, the US Government and -mainly- the EU.

So, apart from and beyond any verbal schemes and hinted-at whispers for “out-of-Europe consumption”, facts prove by themselves that the Greek and Greek-Cypriot policy on the resolution of the Cyprus issue has not been defined as dangerous for European security! Neither has the stance of the current Government of the Republic of Cyprus. So, what’s left? Nothing but the “policy on Cyprus” implemented by the Turkish side, which has been doubted and, in fact, rejected. But this has been the ‘different’, ‘previous’ policy. Now, everyone in the EU hopes to witness a new Turkish policy and a new Turkey, which will be soon be included as a new member of the prosperous European family. That’s our hope.

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P.S. : Dear Dr Alper, please let me know when the present interview is published, so I can purchase a copy. Please charge me for all expenses (copy purchase and posting). I will be indebted to you for all the fuss.

Thank you.

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