**Yearbook
of the Institute
of East-Central Europe**

**Volume 15 (2017)
Issue 4**

Rocznik Instytutu Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej
Rok 15 (2017), Zeszyt 4

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Greece in NATO: Evolution of Interests in the Context of Changes in the International Environment

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Abstract: The main aim of this paper is to present how the security interests of Greece have evolved within the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in the changing international environment. During the Cold War, at the point when Greece became a member of the Alliance (1952), it perceived the Balkan Communist countries as the main threat. NATO was to guarantee security from a possible attack from the north. The Cyprus Crisis of 1974, however, changed Turkey into the main potential enemy. At that time, the United States (US) and NATO began to act to prevent any possible military conflict between Greece and Turkey. Despite Greece's changing international environment, the disintegration of the Eastern Bloc has not led to any change in the perception of Turkey as a major threat. Of course, new threats appeared on the Balkan Peninsula, but these were dealt with by NATO, which bolstered the rationale behind Greece's membership of the Alliance. Further threats to Greek security, stemming from the unstable situation in North Africa and the Middle East, are offset by the involvement of the US and NATO. For Greece, Turkey is still the biggest threat, given its aggressive policy in the Aegean Sea and towards Cyprus.

Keywords: Greece, NATO, Turkey, foreign policy, Greek-Turkish conflict

Introduction

The main aim of this paper is to present how the security interests of Greece have evolved within NATO in the changing international environment. Present-day Greece owes its international position to its strategic location on the political map of the world. The country is located at the junction of three continents: Europe, Asia and Africa. It is a Mediterranean country that controls the Aegean Sea, the only transport route for ships navigating through the Black Sea straits to

the Mediterranean.[1] Greece is very much an archipelagic state (nearly one-third of its surface is islands), so any assessment of its strategic position should take into account the geographical conditions that make it a good location for sea and air bases. The location of this country is of particular importance for the transit of energy resources from the Middle East, the Persian Gulf, the Caucasus and Central Asia. Greece is an important element of the supply chain between hydrocarbon producers and their European customers.

In addition, the Hellenic Republic is located in an extremely conflict-prone region, occupying the southern portion of the Balkan Peninsula, with unstable states of the Middle East and North Africa in the immediate vicinity. As Stępniewski put it, "on the one hand, Greece is located at a crossroads of civilization, and on the other hand, it is a transport and communications hub between Europe and the Middle East."[2] This geographical location has always influenced the shape of Greek foreign policy. When analyzing the modern history of this country, one needs to emphasize that Greece has always experienced the dilemma of whether its foreign policy should be based on alliances with countries that are maritime powers and control the Mediterranean Sea, or with the land power dominating the Balkan Peninsula.[3] After the Second World War, Greece decided to stick to the Western Bloc, choosing the US as its most important ally.

1. Greece in NATO During the Cold War

The end of the Second World War was not the end of military conflict in Greece. The country was engulfed by civil war between 1946 and 1949, during which time there was a communist guerrilla attempt to take control of its northern regions. Those Greeks who remained loyal to the monarchy would not have been able to resist the

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1 G. Demestichas, 'Greek Security and Defense Policy in the Eastern Mediterranean', in: N. Stavrou, R. Ewing (eds) *Mediterranean Security at the Crossroads*, Durnham: Duke University Press, 1997, p. 215.
2 T. Stępniewski, *Geopolityka Morza Czarnego w pozimnowojennym świecie* [Geopolitics of the Black Sea in the Post-Cold War World], Lublin and Warszawa: IEŚW, 2011, p. 255.
3 Th.P. Dokos, 'Greek Defensive Doctrine in the Post-Cold War Era', in: V. Coufoudakis, H. Psomiades, A. Gerolymatos (eds) *Greece and New Balkans. Challenges and Opportunities*, New York: Pella Publishing Company, 1999, p. 243.

expansion of communism from the north alone, especially since the Greek communists had support from the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), Yugoslavia, Bulgaria and Albania. Greece was, at that time, the only country on the Balkan Peninsula that still remained in the sphere of Western influence and was resisting the spread of communism.

The civil war in Greece was the first military confrontation between the two hostile political blocs during the Cold War. While analyzing the process of tightening the bonds between Greece and the countries of the Western Bloc, we should focus in particular on the overall situation in the Eastern Mediterranean. In the same period when Greece was struggling with the communist guerrillas, the Soviet Union demanded that Turkey set up a Soviet base in its territory to control the Black Sea straits. Had these demands been met, and had the communist troops proved successful in Greece, Moscow would have gained unrestricted access to the Mediterranean Sea. This in turn would have made it possible for the USSR to expand further into the Middle East.[4] This aggressive approach to Athens and Ankara, and the threat of spreading communism, forced the US government to take decisive steps to stop Moscow's expansion. In 1947, President Harry S. Truman decided to support Greece and Turkey by announcing a doctrine of military and economic assistance to countries threatened by communism. Thanks to US intervention, the communist guerrillas were defeated and driven out beyond the northern borders of the country.

The victory of government troops in the Greek civil war, with the military and financial assistance of the US, started long-term cooperation between Athens and Washington, D.C. and contributed to the intensification of Greek relations with the countries of the Western Bloc. Ravaged by wars, Greece needed regular financial aid and permanent security guarantees. Greek politicians saw the main threat in the north. The greatest potential enemy was Bulgaria, where Soviet troops were stationed, and which held territorial claims against Greek

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4   M.P. Leffler, 'Strategy, Diplomacy, and the Cold War: The United States, Turkey, and NATO, 1945-1952', *The Journal of American History*, vol. 71, no. 4, 1985, p. 811.

Macedonia and Thrace.[5] Greeks also feared Yugoslavia and Albania.[6] The possibility of an attack on Greece from the north was part of an overall rivalry between the two blocs and of further expansion of the communist influence in the region. In this political set-up, only the US and Western European countries could be the main guarantors of Greek security. Athens therefore sought to obtain sustained military assistance from the US, with the main goal of becoming a NATO member. Greece achieved this goal in February 1952.[7]

The good relations between Greece, the US and other members of the Alliance deteriorated in the mid-1950s, with the emergence of the Cyprus problem.[8] Its subsequent phases in 1964 and 1967 opened a new chapter in Greek foreign policy and in its relations within NATO, especially with regard to the US and Turkey. Greek security policy of that time, which was based on NATO membership, proved insufficient in the context of the new challenges the country faced. The emergence of the Cyprus problem ended the "golden period" of relations between Greece and Turkey. Old wounds reopened and mistrust between the two Aegean neighbors re-emerged. Greeks refused military cooperation with Turkey and suspended all joint maneuvers. NATO's southeastern flank was weakened.[9]

The Cyprus crises, which brought tensions to the relations between Athens and Ankara, were crucial for the perception of NATO's role in Greece's defense system and for redefining the sources of threats to state security. First and foremost, the Greek government realized that it was not the country's northern communist neighbors but Turkey that was the main threat; thus emerged the concept of a threat from the east, associated with possible Turkish aggression.[10] Greek politi-

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5   J.O. Iatrides, 'The United States, Greece and The Balkans', in: V. Coufoudakis, H. Psomiades, A Gerolymatos (eds), *Greece and New Balkans. Challenges and Opportunities*, New York: Pella Publishing Company, 1999, p. 270.

6   A. Stergiou, 'Review Essay. Greece during the Cold War', *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, vol. 8, no. 1, 2008, pp. 69-70.

7   D. Chourchulis, L. Kourkouvelas, 'Greek perceptions of NATO Turing the Cold War', *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, vol. 12, no. 4, 2012, p. 499.

8   A. Adamczyk, *Cypr. Dzieje polityczne* [Cyprus. Political history], Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Dialog, 2012, pp. 116-117.

9   T.W. Adams, A.J. Cortrell, *Cyprus between East and West*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1968, pp. 60-61.

10 Th.P. Dokos, 'Greek Defensive Doctrine in the Post-Cold War Era', op. cit., p. 245.

cians came to realize that, while NATO provided a guarantee of security from external aggression, it failed to produce any instrument to ensure security in the event of an attack on one member by another. In such a situation, NATO was helpless.

In July 1974, the ruling Greek junta, called the Regime of the Colonels, decided to intervene in Cyprus and to overthrow President Makarios III, who was sympathetic to the USSR. The aim of the coup was to seize power in Cyprus and to pave the path to future incorporation of the island into Greece. The junta completely ignored the possibility of Turkey becoming involved. It believed that it could reach an agreement with Ankara within the framework of NATO. But the coup attempt provoked a Turkish intervention: Ankara invaded northern Cyprus on 20 July 1974, and occupied nearly 40 per cent of the island. The two countries once again stood at the brink of war. As a result of the failed operation, the Regime of the Colonels collapsed. The new, democratic government of Kostas Karamanlis demanded the withdrawal of Turkish troops from the island. Greece and Turkey both proclaimed a general mobilization and were preparing for war. The unity of NATO was once again severely tested, and once again the Alliance proved helpless in the face of an internal conflict. In Greece, the atmosphere was tense and anti-American because of the lack of a US response to the Turkish invasion of Cyprus. Greek society expected Karamanlis' government to take concrete steps, and Karamanlis decided to withdraw Greece from NATO's military structures, following the French example, and remaining only in the political dimension of the Alliance.

The Cyprus crisis of 1974 confirmed the opinion of Greek politicians that Turkey was indeed the greatest threat to their country. In Turkey, the invasion of Cyprus gave rise to new hostile behavior towards Greece: the questioning of the borders in the Aegean Sea and of Greece's ownership of the islands located off the coast of Asia Minor. The decision to withdraw Greece from NATO's military structures was meant to force the US and its remaining allies to exert pressure on Ankara to withdraw Turkish forces from Cyprus. This policy of the Greek government proved ineffective, and Turkey began to use the absence of the Greek military in NATO to strengthen its own position. Faced with this, the government in Athens intensified its efforts to return to full participation in the Alliance. Certain international events helped Greece in these endeavors, mobilizing NATO mem-

bers to seek unity and avoid conflicts within the Alliance. In 1979, the USSR intervened in Afghanistan; that same year, the Khomeini revolution in Iran deprived the US and the United Kingdom (UK) of their influence in this country. The Soviet Union strengthened its nuclear force in the Warsaw Pact countries, which clearly alarmed NATO.[11] In May 1980, the long-time leader of the Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Josip Broz Tito, died, causing concerns among the neighbors, especially Greece, about what the new direction of Belgrade's foreign policy would be. Turkey, in turn, experienced social unrest that led to a military coup. The unstable international situation contributed to an agreement between Greece and NATO on restoring the former to the military structures of the Alliance as of 18 October 1980.[12]

Greece's role in NATO and its policy towards the Alliance and the US changed radically in 1981. As of 1 January 1981, Greece became a member of the European Communities, which allowed it to expand its economic cooperation with Western European states and gradually become economically independent from the US. The economic development achieved as a result of accession consolidated its international standing, especially in relation to Turkey. The fact that Andreas Papandreou, the anti-American leader of the social democratic party PASOK (Πανελλήνιο Σοσιαλιστικό Κίνημα), became prime minister in October 1981 had a huge effect on Greek foreign policy. Papandreou believed that Turkey was the greatest threat to Greece. What Greece expected from NATO, in particular from the US, was ensuring the security of its borders, especially those with Turkey. He demanded guarantees from the Allies that Greece's borders would be defended in the event of Turkish aggression.[13] He achieved nothing, however, because of Turkey's protest; and what is more, other participants defined their positions in the conflict as neutral, suggesting that the two states should settle their dispute between themselves.

Despite his harsh anti-American attitude, Papandreou was aware that it would be most beneficial for Greece to remain a member of

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11   S. Rizas, 'Atlanticism and Europeanism in Greek foreign and security policy in the 1970s', *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, vol. 8, no. 1, 2008, p. 63.

12   Ch. Kassimeris, *Greece and The American Embrace. Greek Foreign Policy Towards Turkey, The US and The Western Alliance*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, p. 123.

13   D. Chourchulis, L. Kourkouvelas, op. cit., p. 509.

NATO and the European Communities. He clearly saw Greece as anchored in the Western Bloc and aimed for greater political independence. He realized that NATO did not guarantee territorial integrity in the event of an attack by Turkey, but was still the perfect political forum for communication with the Turks and trying to exert pressure on Ankara through the other Allies. Greece always tried to show that it was the one being harmed in relations with Turkey. The US remained a special partner of Greece, mainly because it acted as a mediator in the conflict and because it was the only power that could stop Turkey from using force against Greece. Despite Greece being anchored in the Western Bloc, its relations with the US and NATO throughout the period of Papandreou's rule, that is between 1981 and 1989, remained rather cold.

2. Greece in NATO after the Cold War

The dissolution of the Eastern Bloc and the Soviet Union led to a radical change in the international system. The threat of an Eastern European attack on NATO was no longer an issue. New threats emerged, however: nationalism and ethnic and religious conflicts. This concerned, in particular, Southeast Europe, including Greece, which suddenly felt cornered by the problems arising in the Balkan states. NATO also faced the challenge of preparing itself for a new kind of threat, which had not been the main subject of cooperation within the Alliance. The NATO members decided unanimously that they should advance beyond the existing defense regime based on Article 5 of the Washington Treaty towards "out-of-area" operations. As part of this strategy, the Alliance declared readiness to participate in peace missions organized by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the United Nations (UN). The main decisions on this issue were made by the North Atlantic Council in December 1992.[14]

Naturally, Greece was a proponent of the expansion of NATO's area of operations because it felt at the center of the new threats. It was es-

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14 R. Zięba, 'Bezpieczeństwo państw zrzeszonych w NATO i Unii Europejskiej' [Security of NATO and EU Member States], in: R. Zięba (ed.) *Bezpieczeństwo międzynarodowe po zimnej wojnie* [International Security after the Cold War], Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Akademickie i Profesjonalne, 2008, pp. 265-266.

pecially concerned by the situation beyond its northern border. The beginning of the 1990s was a very difficult period for Greek foreign policy because of the bloody process of the dissolution of Yugoslavia. Greece was surprised by the developments in the Balkans and initially did not know how to react. At first, Greece adopted a strategy of supporting the territorial integrity of the Yugoslavian federation, striving to preserve the *status quo.*[15] It tried to convince the other NATO members to refrain from recognizing the declarations of independence of the newly formed republics. It remained especially sensitive about the issue of recognizing the independence of the Republic of Macedonia, mainly because it did not agree to the name and symbols used by this state. The Greek state, having experienced two Balkan wars and two world wars, was aware of how great a danger the dissolution of Yugoslavia was and what tragic consequences it could bring about. First of all, Greeks feared the outbreak of a new war and the reopening of the issue of borders. These concerns confirmed the importance of NATO membership for Greece. Athens could feel more secure with the guarantees provided by the Alliance. The attempts to stop other NATO members from recognizing the independence of the new states failed, and Greece finally also recognized Croatia, Slovenia, and later Bosnia and Hercegovina, as a sign of solidarity. It only refused to recognize the Republic of Macedonia under this name.[16]

Initially, NATO Allies did not focus on the events in the Balkans, failing to recognize the true scale of the threat. It was not until 1993 that the new US President, Bill Clinton, made a more determined move against Serbs, who were considered the main aggressors in the Yugoslav conflict. Despite the friendly attitude of Greek society towards Serbs, the Greek government remained loyal to the other NATO members, declaring its participation in the Alliance's planned initiatives. Prime minister Konstantinos Mitsotakis decided that Greece would take part in NATO's air operation "Deny Flight," conducted under the auspices of the UN, which was eventually launched in April 1993. Greece also participated in economic sanctions and in an embargo

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15   N. Zahariadis, 'Nationalism and Small State Foreign Policy: The Greek Response to the Macedonian Issue', *Political Science Quarterly*, vol. 109, no. 4, 1994, p. 655.
16   V.B. Sotirovic, 'Turkey, Greece, Italy and Security in the Mediterranean Sea Area', *Journal of Global Peace and Conflict*, vol. 2, no. 1, 2014, p. 65.

on arms sales to former Yugoslavia.[17] His successor, Andreas Papandreou, who became prime minister in October 1993, continued the involvement in NATO operations. It should be emphasized, however, that this involvement consisted mainly in making military bases and airspace available to NATO forces, and that the Turkish air force was denied access.[18] Despite some initial problems between the Alliance members, and the lack of common voice on NATO's involvement in the Balkan conflict, the situation was finally settled by the conclusion of the Dayton Agreement in 1995. From the point of view of Greek security, the conflict was resolved and prevented from spreading to Albania and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), the name adopted within the UN for the Republic of Macedonia, which would have brought the threat directly to the borders of Greece. The conflict in the Balkans confirmed the value of the Alliance for Athens. Considering the unstable situation in the Balkans, the emerging nationalism and religious, social and economic conflicts, NATO membership was shown to be especially important for ensuring the security and territorial integrity of Greece.

The mid-1990s was a period of renewed tensions between Greece and Turkey, which attracted NATO's attention. In 1994, Papandreou decided to adopt a new common defense doctrine for Greece and Cyprus. Of course, the doctrine was prepared because of the sense of threat to both states from Turkey, but it was defensive rather than offensive.[19] Naturally, Ankara did not like the new defense doctrine, treating it as aimed against it. This triggered additional tension between Greece and Turkey, leading to cases of violations of Greek airspace by Turkish aircraft and increasingly hostile rhetoric by Turkish politicians, challenging the current borders in the Aegean Sea. In January 1996, another crisis broke out in relations between Athens and Ankara; it concerned the ownership of the islets of Imia/Kardak. Turkey challenged Greek sovereignty over these islands, which led to

17   S.V. Papacosma, 'NATO, Greece, and the Balkans in the Post-cold War Era', in: V. Coufoudakis, H. Psomiades, A. Gerolymatos (eds), *Greece and New Balkans. Challenges and Opportunities*, New York: Pella Publishing Company, 1999, p. 58.
18   S. Guvenc, S. Ozel, 'NATO and Turkey in the post-Cold War world: between abandonment and entrapment', *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, vol. 12, no. 4, 2012, p. 544.
19   G.P. Bozikas, *U.S. Security Assistance and Regional Balance of Power: Greece and Turkey, A Case Study*, Pennsylvania: U.S. Army War College, 1998, p. 43.

both countries deploying their naval forces to the area. The situation was dramatic, and, in the opinion of experts, it actually gave rise to a real risk of open war. Again, the NATO members, and in particular the US, made swift efforts to prevent military confrontation.

The continuing escalation of tensions between Greece and Turkey led to a sort of arms race between the two countries.[20] The new Greek prime minister from the PASOK party, Costas Simitis, decided to take advantage of NATO as a communications platform and the mediation of other Alliance members to get closer to Ankara. During the NATO summit in Madrid in July 1997, with the help of US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, the Greek and Turkish foreign ministers Theodoros Pangalos and Ismail Cem held talks in which they agreed on the content of the Madrid Declaration on the normalization of relations.

As a result of this initiative, which led to an improvement in the relations between Athens and Ankara, structural problems within NATO were resolved. Turkey agreed to the establishment of new regional NATO headquarters in Larissa, which became one of the four regional NATO structures in the Mediterranean region, alongside Verona, Madrid and Izmir. It was agreed that the headquarters in Larissa and Izmir would jointly control NATO flights and exercises in the Aegean Sea. In Larissa, the chief of staff was a Turkish general, while Izmir was under control of a Greek general, with American officers as their deputies.[21] The agreement also resulted in the decision to organize joint NATO military maneuvers in the Aegean Sea in autumn 1998, code-named *Dynamic Mix*, in which the armies of the two countries joined the other Allies in an amicable atmosphere.[22] The mediation efforts undertaken by the Alliance contributed to the improvement of relations between Greece and Turkey and to the start of a new era in these relations. It should be stressed, however, that the European Union (EU) as well as Turkey's aspirations to join it also made a contribution, by motivating Turkey to become more willing to make concessions. Still, however, the two countries remained distrustful of each

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20 F. Moustakis, *The Greek-Turkish Relationship and NATO*, London and Portland: Franc Cass, 2005.
21 H. Dinella, *Imia, NATO, and Alpha Centauri*, July 7, 2011, https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/imia-nato-and-alpha-centauri [2017-08-23].
22 N. Burns, 'The United States and Greece: A Partnership for the Twenty-First Century', *Mediterranean Quarterly*, vol. 10, no. 3, Fall 1999, p. 18.

other. Fear of the Turkish threat is a permanent characteristic of Greek society and is very prominent among Greek politicians.

The agreement with Turkey made it possible to organize joint NATO exercises in the Aegean Sea and increased the capacity of Greek operational forces. The cooperation between the Larissa facility and the Izmir facility provided an opportunity for frequent communication and for clarifying possible incidents that might have occurred between Greece and Turkey. It was an excellent platform for exchanging information. Regulating the status of the NATO headquarters in Greece led to the more frequent presence of other Allies' troops in this country, which also strengthened Athens' international position, especially in the eyes of its Balkan neighbors. In the face of the events in the Balkans, the Larissa facility was an important bridgehead for NATO itself, giving it greater control of the situation and a chance to react swiftly should the need arise. One of the reasons for Greece to seek normalization of relations with Turkey was the threat from the north that Athens still felt was real. Greece was afraid of an unstable situation at its borders, and it did not want to be faced with a confrontation on two fronts.

One common fear among Greek society was related to the idea of "Greater Albania", a strong Albanian state in the Balkans, which would consist of the territories of Albania, Kosovo and the part of FYROM inhabited by Albanians. Greeks believed that Albania might also lay claim to southern Epirus, which belonged to Greece. Another perceived threat was the policy pursued by Skopje, with its strongly nationalist views and the risk of questioning Greek ownership of Greek Macedonia.[23] The second half of the 1990s was a period in which the Greek government was trying to use NATO as a forum for securing its own interests in the Balkans. At the memorable NATO summit in Madrid, Simitis agreed to the acceptance of the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland into the Alliance, but at the same time he stressed that the Balkan countries should be treated as equal with those Central European states and also have a prospect of joining the Alliance. At that time, Simitis mostly supported the membership aspirations of

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23   R. Clogg, *Historia Grecji nowożytnej* [History of Modern Greece], Warszawa: Książka i Wiedza, 2006, p. 253.

Bulgaria, Romania and Slovenia. The Greek government was hoping that the prospect of joining European structures would contribute to greater stability and predictability of its Balkan partners. As a result of the actions of Greece and the other Allies interested in stabilizing the Balkans, NATO invited Albania, Bulgaria, the FYROM, Romania and Slovenia to participate in the Partnership for Peace. Greece took part in exercises jointly organized by NATO and these countries in the FYROM in May 1997.[24] It also participated in the *Implementation Force* (IFOR) and *Sustainment Force* (SFOR) missions in Bosnia and Herzegovina, organized under the auspices of NATO and others,[25] and in 1997 it sent a contingent of troops to Albania as part of an international mission with the other NATO Allies to appease the social situation after the Albanian pyramid scheme crisis.

The Kosovo crisis, which began in Serbia in 1998, was a great challenge for Greek foreign policy. Once again, bloody fights between the Serbian government forces and the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) motivated the NATO states to intervene. Greek society, which was sympathetic to the Serbs, opposed Greece's participation in the NATO operation. The government in Athens feared that a NATO intervention to defend Kosovars would contribute to the emergence of an independent Kosovar state, which would destabilize the situation in the Balkans. It was afraid that such a step could lead to the outbreak of civil war in the FYROM and to the secession of the part of the FYROM inhabited by Albanians and its incorporation in Kosovo. Despite diplomatic efforts within NATO, Simitis failed to stop the involvement of the Alliance against Serbia. In spite of their beliefs, the government in Athens took the unpopular decision to participate in *Operation Allied Force*, demonstrating solidarity with the other Allies in 1999. However, Greece's participation was limited to making its air bases available to NATO forces and coordinating military operations from the headquarters in Larissa. After the end of the military operation in Kosovo, Greece decided to send a contingent of troops

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24   Th. Couloumbis, 'Strategic Consensus in Greek Domestic and Foreign Policy since 1974', *Thesis*, vol. 1, no. 4, Winter 1998, pp. 2-3.

25   H. Dinella, *Imia, NATO, and Alpha Centauri*, July 7, 2011, https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/imia-nato-and-alpha-centauri [2017-08-23].

to this separatist region of Serbia as part of the peace-support operation *Kosovo Force* (KFOR).

It turned out that Greece had been right to be concerned about the Kosovo problem being likely to spill over to neighboring countries. In 2001, fighting broke out in the FYROM between the Albanian minority and government forces. Greece felt especially threatened by this conflict because it shares a border with this country. This time, the situation was resolved by the initiative of NATO and the EU, culminating in the conclusion of the Ohrid Agreement. This once again proved the huge stabilizing role of the Alliance in the region. The effectiveness of NATO in the Balkans consolidated Greece's belief that being a member of the Alliance is a huge asset in ensuring its security.

Greece as a NATO member is also particularly interested in the development of the situation in the eastern Mediterranean, which is also a source of various threats, not only to Greece but to Europe as a whole. What focused NATO's attention on the situation in this part of the world were the terrorist attacks on the US of 11 September 2001. All members of the Alliance condemned them and pledged assistance to the US under Article 5 of the Washington Treaty. Naturally, the Greek government also declared its readiness to help, and decided to involve Greek soldiers in NATO's *International Security Assistance Force* (ISAF), established under a UN resolution. Greece made military bases on its territory available to the Alliance, with a special role played by the sea and air base in the Souda Bay in Crete.[26] Greece also participated in *Operation Active Endeavor,* the aim of which was to secure vessels navigating the Mediterranean Sea from terrorist attacks. Together with other NATO and EU countries, Greece also engaged in the international operation against piracy off the Somali coast and in the Gulf of Aden (Combined Maritime Forces[27]), conducted under the auspices of the UN. It is also worth stressing that Greece is one of the countries whose trade fleet is most threatened by Somali pirates.

The joint action of the NATO members after the terrorist attacks on the US was followed by a period of internal divisions within the Alliance. First, the White House tried to persuade the Allies to en-

26   D. Binder, 'Greece, Turkey and NATO', *Mediterranean Quarterly*, vol. 23, no. 2, 2012, p. 96.
27   https://combinedmaritimeforces.com/ctf-151-counter-piracy [2017-08-26].

gage in another intervention in Iraq in 2003, but failed to do so. Only eight NATO members contributed to US military intervention against Saddam Hussein's regime, accused of possessing nuclear weapons. Greece was not one of them. Simitis believed that the problem was better solved by diplomatic methods and refused to send troops to Iraq. The government in Athens declared, however, that it would open Greek airspace and the naval base in Crete to the NATO members involved in the intervention in Iraq for the purpose of the operation.[28]

In the following years, Greece focused within NATO on the situation in the eastern Mediterranean and in Europe. In 2004, new states joined the Alliance, Bulgaria and Romania, among others. The Greek government supported this accession as it was part of the stabilization process in the Balkans. It was particularly interested in building good relations with Bulgaria, which for decades had been regarded as a potential enemy. Bulgaria's accession to the Alliance opened a new positive chapter in relations between Athens and Sofia. Another important event on the Balkan Peninsula was the proclamation of independence by Kosovo in February 2008. Inspired by the White House, the proclamation created a new state, but some NATO members did not support this and refused to recognize Kosovo despite the diplomatic efforts of the US. Greece was among them; it believed that Kosovo's secession from Serbia could provide a precedent for recognizing the self-proclaimed Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. A few months later, in April 2008, at the NATO summit in Bucharest, Greece and the other NATO members agreed to expand the Alliance the following year to include Croatia and Albania. Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro were also invited to participate in NATO in the future, and strengthening the partnership with Serbia was also considered. At the same summit, Greece blocked the initiative to invite the FYROM to NATO because of the dispute between these countries over the name "Republic of Macedonia." Athens announced that, in order for this country to join NATO, it first needed to resolve the dispute and to settle with Greece on the issue of its name. The Bucharest sum-

mit can be seen as a great success for Greece: NATO's enlargement to include other Balkan states was gradually building a zone of stability, predictable relations and, above all, security north of the Greek border. The exclusion of the FYROM from this zone is obviously a regional problem, including for Greece itself, but the enormous pressure from Greek society, which has not been able to accept the name of their northern neighbor, has prevailed. Greece has kept expecting, however, that the pressure exerted by the Alliance, combined with FYROM's desire to join NATO, would be so great that Skopje would eventually give in.

In 2010, at the Lisbon summit, NATO devised a new strategic concept, in which it recognized that instability and conflicts outside NATO may directly jeopardize the security of its members, and that what still remained NATO's main task was to ensure their security and freedom. Consequently, in the event of such threats to NATO coming from outside its territory, the Alliance would intervene in order to mitigate them. The development of the new strategy coincided with the outbreak of the Arab Spring and complete destabilization in the Mediterranean. Just like all other members of the Alliance, Greece was surprised by these developments. Its main objectives were to prevent the outbreak of international crises and to ensure the continuity of energy supplies to Europe. The Greek government declared its readiness to engage in a potential NATO or UN mission. Athens was particularly interested in the situation in Libya, with which it had signed trade contracts. The civil war and the escalation of Qaddafi's bloody repressions led to *Operation Unified Protector*,[29] launched by NATO under a United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution. Greece also participated in the operation, albeit to a limited extent. In March 2011, the government in Athens opened its airspace and its base in Crete and in the Peloponnese to the intervening Allies' forces.

The rise of unrest in the Mediterranean region coincided with the escalation of the great financial and economic crisis in Greece. The financial crisis, which started in 2008, forced Athens to redefine its ability to influence the international arena on account of the country's

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29 *Greece and NATO: a long lasting relationship,* http://www.nato.int/docu/review/2012/Turkey-Greece/Greece-NATO-partnership/EN/index.htm [2017-08-27].

catastrophic budgetary situation.[30] In September 2011, Greek defense minister Panagiotis Beglitis announced that Greece would be forced to limit its contribution to NATO and EU missions.[31] Reducing Greece's involvement in the region for economic reasons amid the tense situation in the Mediterranean helped reinforce the belief among Greek politicians that NATO involvement in the region, in particular the presence of the US, was essential.[32] The presence of US troops became very important for Greeks in the context of the renewed deterioration of the relations with Turkey. Another crisis in relations between the two broke out in 2011, this time regarding the exploitation of hydrocarbons on the continental shelf of Cyprus. Greece naturally provided diplomatic support to the Republic of Cyprus, which led to increased tensions between Athens and Ankara. Once again, the White House had to become involved in order to prevent the situation from escalating.

These tensions between Greece and Turkey within NATO emerged at a time when the two states were in completely different political and economic situations. Greece, suffering from the consequences of the economic crisis, forced to reduce its diplomatic activity and depending on financial aid from international institutions, had very weak international standing. Turkey, in turn, was experiencing economic growth and rebuilding its relations with the Middle East and Central Asia, fully enjoying its role of a major regional power. The leader of the Justice and Development Party, at the same time the prime minister (and later President of Turkey), Recep Taip Erdogan, was promoting the idea of building a Turkish power between Europe and Asia. The government in Ankara had started to distance itself from the other European states and the US, trying to get the most out of its own environment. It had been seeking an agreement on Middle East issues with Russia and Iran, which oppose the US and NATO. Erdogan had also begun to undermine the solutions adopted under the Treaty of Lausanne, which had imposed external borders on Turkey and de-

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30 More on the crisis: A. Visvizi, *Greece, The Greeks, and the Crisis: Reaching Beyond "That's how it goes"*, Carnegie Council for Ethics in International Affairs, September 2016, https://www.carnegiecouncil.org/publications/articles_papers_reports/787 [2017-08-27].
31 D. Binder, op. cit., p. 96.
32 Th. Dokos, 'The Evolving Mediterranean Perspective of Greece in the Transatlantic Context', in: *Southern Europe and the Mediterranean. National Approaches and Transatlantic Perspectives*, The German Marshall Fund, Mediterranean Paper Series 2011, p. 32.

prived it of many territories, including Mosul and Kirkuk. Erdogan also publicly challenged Greek sovereignty over the Aegean Islands and of Western Thrace. These ideas have been particularly distressing to Greek society and politicians, leading to a renewed fear of a threat from the east.

Greece wants to rebuild its international position at all costs, and to prevent its defense capabilities from becoming outmatched by Turkey's offensive capabilities. It has been increasingly hard to implement these plans due to the emergence of yet another crisis in the Greek state: since mid-2015, hundreds of thousands of refugees and illegal immigrants from the Middle East have arrived in Greece through Turkey. Although they have treated Greece as a transit country on their way to other EU countries, Greece's European partners criticized Athens for failing to control its borders. However, the influx of migrants into Greece was primarily caused by the intentional policy of Turkey, which made it possible. The EU–Turkey Agreement of March 2016 halted the influx of refugees across the Aegean Sea. NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg declared the Alliance would offer assistance to the European Union in implementing the agreement through cooperation with FRONTEX and by sending ships to the Aegean Sea to monitor the execution of the agreement. The NATO fleet included German, Canadian, French, Greek and Turkish vessels, which were to operate in the territorial waters of Greece and Turkey. What is important, however, is that, due to mutual distrust, it was agreed that Greek and Turkish ships could not cross into each other's territorial waters.[33]

The more Turkey distanced itself from its European and American partners, the more Greece felt threatened by the unpredictability of its neighbor. The more independent Turkey became and the less it needed US support in the region, the more limited the influence of Washington, D.C. on Ankara. This, in turn, posed a danger to Greece, which until then had counted on US diplomatic intervention in the event of a crisis. The influence of the US and the other NATO Allies on Turkey deteriorated even further after Turkey had experienced a failed attempt to overthrow Erdogan in July 2016. The Turkish lead-

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33 A. Jacobs, 'In Troubled Waters. NATO's New Maritime Activity in The Aegean', NDC Research Report, Research Division NATO College, 01/16 March 2016, pp. 4-6.

er accused the US of having been involved in the coup, and the European NATO members of failing to react to it. These events further weakened Turkey's relations within the Alliance and intensified Erdogan's harsh rhetoric in the relations with Greece. Turkish airplanes increasingly often violated Greek airspace, ignoring Athens' warnings. Feeling that Turkey was a perpetual threat, Greek defense minister Panos Kammenos, in addition to his own military efforts, suggested that Greece should enhance cooperation within NATO. He proposed that the US set up a new NATO airbase on one of the eastern Aegean islands, near the border with Turkey. Possible locations for the airbase included the islands of Karpathos or Castellorizo.[34] However, the proposal was dismissed. Aware of the threat, Greece still maintains high spending on defense, despite the ongoing economic crisis. It remains one of few NATO countries that allocate more than two per cent of their GDP to armaments. Although this is a huge financial burden on the state, the Greek government has the full support of the Greek society and politicians, including the opposition. The Greek projects meet the expectations of US President Donald Trump, who demands that NATO members fulfill their treaty commitments in respect of this financial threshold. One can, therefore, hardly be surprised by Greek budgetary plans, considering that the country feels threatened by Turkey and suffers the consequences of the unstable situation in the eastern Mediterranean.

Conclusion

Greece's membership of NATO is the core pillar of the country's security. During the Cold War, seeking its place in the Western Bloc, it was determined to become a NATO member. It perceived the Alliance as a guarantee of protection against a possible attack by the communist bloc, which had dominated the Balkan Peninsula. Greek politicians called this "the threat from the north" or "the Slavic communist threat." From the first Cyprus crisis, however, Greece began to gradu-

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34   Greek Defense Minister's Comment on NATO Airbase in Karpathos Causes Syriza Reaction, http://greece.greekreporter.com/2015/05/26/greek-defense-ministers-comment-on-nato-airbase-in-karpathos-causes-syriza-reactions/ [2017-08-28].

ally redefine its sense of threat by observing the increasingly aggressive behavior of Turkey in the Aegean Sea. It should be emphasized that Greece was particularly closely linked with the Republic of Cyprus, with 80 per cent of the population of the latter being Greek Cypriots. The Cyprus crisis of 1974, which ended with a Turkish invasion of the northern part of the island, caused the already strained relations between Greece and Turkey to collapse. The main problem in the dispute between Athens and Ankara, apart from the Turkish occupation of the island, was that Turkey questioned the delimitation of borders in the Aegean Sea and the ownership of the Aegean Islands. The year 1974 was a turning point in contemporary Greek foreign policy, as it is then that Turkey was deemed the main threat to Greece's security. Greeks perceived the Turkish invasion of Cyprus as the prelude to further aggression on the Aegean Islands inhabited by Greeks. Greek politicians called this "the threat from the east" and soon defined it as far more dangerous than the inter-bloc threat from the communist north. The biggest problem for Greece in its endeavors to protect itself against Turkish aggression was that Turkey was also a member of NATO, and that the Alliance had not yet worked out any internal anti-aggression mechanisms. The subsequent crises between Greece and Turkey were settled with the help of US diplomacy and, to a lesser extent, of other NATO Allies. The US intervened in the name of the cohesion of the Western Bloc, often failing to understand or underestimating the significance of this conflict for the internal political scene of the two Aegean countries.

The dissolution of the Eastern Bloc completely changed the international situation. However, it did not change the perception of Turkey as the main threat to Greece. At the same time, besides the threat from Ankara, a new threat emerged as a result of the unstable situation in the Balkans, related to the breakup of Yugoslavia. Greece could feel secure in this situation, however, because NATO was a guarantor of its security, and over time, the situation in the Balkans was stabilized. Most of the Balkan states became members of NATO, and some of them entered the EU, leading to the Europeanization of these countries, which ensured stability and predictability among Greece's neighbors. The only neighbor who has not been involved in this process is the FYROM, which is in dispute with Greece. It should be stressed, however, that the unstable situation in Kosovo, Serbia and Bosnia and

Herzegovina poses a threat to the stability of the Balkans. In this unstable situation in the region, NATO membership is the basis of security guarantees for Greece.

The events in North Africa and in the Middle East that followed the Arab Spring led to the emergence of new threats to Greece: local conflicts, the Islamic State, civil wars and the resulting refugee waves, terrorist organizations, illegal immigration, arms smuggling – all these new risks have been identified as a threat to the members of the Alliance. In view of its geographical location, Greece is particularly vulnerable to such threats and seeks NATO security guarantees. Turkey, in turn, is trying to build a strong international position in this new geopolitical situation. The policy pursued by the Justice and Development Party led by Erdogan is aimed at loosening ties with the US and European countries. Ankara believes in its own strength and is trying to build its power in the region through cooperation with Iran and Russia. Distancing itself from Washington, D.C. and Europe, it is weakening its position in NATO, thus making it possible for Greece to strengthen its own position in the Alliance. At the same time, however, by distancing itself from the US and Europe, Turkey is becoming more unpredictable. The stronger and more independent of the US that Turkey gets, the less effective the influence of the White House on Turkey's behavior and the resolution of a potential conflict between Greece and Turkey is going to be. It is therefore hardly surprising that, despite the ongoing economic crisis, Greece does not want to reduce its defense spending. The visit of US President Barack Obama to Athens in November 2016, during which he declared that the US would remain involved in NATO and focus on transatlantic relations regardless of the outcome of the next presidential election, was a positive sign for Greece's security. Trump, went on his first overseas visit in May 2017, to the Middle East, and visited Saudi Arabia and Israel but not Turkey. This can be interpreted as a sign of the belief that Turkey's position in the region has weakened, which, in turn, could be construed as the US and NATO ascribing greater significance to Greece in the region.

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