

GLOBAL AND REGIONAL ORDER

WHAT'S CHANGED SINCE FEBRUARY 24TH? A WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY FOR GREEK FOREIGN POLICY

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Greece was right to take a clear stance in favour of Kyiv, avoiding the 'grey-area' neutrality that could be so damaging to a pro-status quo country.



Athens now expects the EU -and Berlin in particular- to proactively support it against Turkish claims, breaking with the policy of maintaining equal distance in Greek-Turkish disputes.



In the western Balkans, Greek diplomacy should aim for a role as a proactively responsible provider of security and stability.

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PREAMBLE

The Russian invasion of Ukraine on 24 February is part of the systematic and enhanced efforts of the Kremlin (especially following the 2014 crisis) to lay claim to its historical, and later lost, buffer zones, in order to recover what is for Russia vital and high-value strategic depth against the West, in a desperate effort to stop its downward spiral and exploit the rifts and uncertainties within the West, under the weight of an imperial past it can neither shoulder, nor shake off, stifling it in anachronistic contexts and an inability to break free from the long tradition of authoritarianism. Apart from the revival of a “brain-dead” NATO, there came Europe’s unprecedented shift in stance, with Germany’s decision on equipment and the collective will for sanctions, including Russia’s exclusion from Western investments/technologies, and especially the gradual reduction of energy dependence, despite the high cost. This indicates that the West would probably have made this decision in any case, and, if it can sustain it, it will have very severe long-term repercussions for Russia. Consequently, the latter also underestimated the fact that, seeing as it was not facing an immediate threat, it would essentially be taking a disproportionate risk, as even a victory on the battlefield, which would certainly keep Ukraine out of NATO, would come at the cost of weakening Russia itself. What’s worse, in practice, it essentially handed over Ukraine to the West, it strengthened its national unity, and even enhanced its arms to a degree beyond what it would have as a member of NATO, while also providing Sweden and Finland with the opportunity to join the Atlantic Alliance.

But was Russia perhaps concerned not just about NATO, but also about Ukraine and the EU coming closer together? Because it would have positive repercussions for Ukraine, as it did for the rest of Eastern Europe, leading it permanently out of reach? This approach goes beyond the issue of Ukrainian neutrality and completely abolishes its independence, which President Putin had already spoken about in pejorative terms. From this perspective, in the end, Russia’s risk seems originate with the regime itself, which elevates its preservation into an overriding interest and projects its anachronistic outlook onto the world, particularly Europe, to the detriment of the Russian people, who have now become more insecure.

Besides outlining developments in Europe, the following text highlights the “window of opportunity” that is being created for Greece and the regional dimension of its foreign policy, with its role and position being enhanced, perhaps for the first time since the end of the Cold War.

GREECE AND THE RUSSIAN INVASION

Following the invasion, for the Hellenic Republic, serving national interests and the core of its value paradigm (national sovereignty, international law, moral commitments), in conjunction with the network of historical, ethnic, and religious ties with Ukraine itself (Mariupol, Odessa, the 2nd Hagia Sophia, etc.), rightly left no room for “grey areas” of neutrality, all the more so given that both Greece and Cyprus are neighbours with Turkey, which is implementing a revisionist policy on an inter-regional level, due to its renewed self-confidence after the enhancement of its geopolitical size and power, with unsettled scores as regards its imperial past and the West itself, in the context of its new standing as a more autonomous central medium-sized power that will maintain the role of a bridge and, most importantly, the capacity of a third pole between the West and Eurasia, through regular reversals in one direction or the other, implying a transactional culture that redefines the fundamental “rules of the game” and what the acceptable limits for exercising foreign policy are, with the use of military power as a means of resolving disputes being legitimised by the majority of Turkish society (57% in a relevant survey by the Friedrich Ebert German political foundation!).

Based on the above, through their revisionism, Russia and Turkey are promoting an alternative international order that is anti-democratic in nature, breaking with the Western-centric model of liberal internationalism. The content of the Joint Statement by Russia and China (4 February 2022) on the “new era” in international relations² confirms the relevant assumptions, including the return to times of being steered by the great powers, with understandings on spheres of influence and suzerainty. In the context of these “new rules”, concepts such as sovereignty, democracy, rule of law, and human rights are being revised for the worse.

1 <https://peace.fes.de/security-radar-2022>

2 <http://en.kremlin.ru/supplement/5770>

THE INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM IN TRANSITION: EUROPE'S ROLE AND GREECE'S "WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY"

With the international system still in a competitive transitional period of structural change, the war in Ukraine is accelerating the need to strengthen the cohesion of the western front and to fortify developed liberal democracies, with the latter being called upon to initiate the charge, starting with addressing chronic and festering internal issues (rifts, uncertainties, a crisis of globalisation, authoritarian populism, withdrawal of the West); otherwise, systemic risks will continue to surface every time the traditional elites (on a national or European level) fall short of the *acquis* and practice of liberal democracies, resulting in shallow and benumbed popular support amid a generalised apathy and/or increased social tension. At the end of the day, it is politics that remains vulnerable and which may prove to be the greatest burden and the most precarious issue in controlling and sustaining a united Europe.

Two and a half years ago, in an article in *Foreign Affairs*, my colleague Graham Allison analysed the period of renewed geopolitical competition between the major powers. He recalled three basic concepts that shed light on the changing relationships between the countries leading developments: spheres of influence – the balance of powers – alliances³. All of the above, adapted to the globalised environment of the 21st century, are essentially the keys that will continue to define both the interpretative framework and the specific characteristics of the evolving international order in the years to come. Due to the Russian invasion, revisionism will be repudiated in the short term, but may return later. At that time, the gravitational pull and breadth of application of liberal values (see international law, international responsibility, moral interest) will depend on their degree of prioritisation in the preferences and main interests among major and (as the case may be) certain medium-sized national players in the world order. It should be noted that in 2018, German Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Social Democrats Sigmar Gabriel declared that "in a world full of carnivores, vegetarians have a very tough time of it"⁴. As things stand, in Europe we will experience the end of the vegetarian era. This is a positive development if the EU is to succeed in maintaining its position as a central player in international relations in the decades to come.

But to move ahead, we must truly be daring; without abandoning the problem, but, mainly, by discussing our uncomfortable truths in detail, so that we collectively safeguard the ideals and the framework of values of liberal democracy from losing its nerve and, in the end, being trapped in the shackles of populist fantasies. Otherwise, the risk of gradual backsliding into uncharted waters of short-sighted protectionism and poisonous nationalism will remain very real. In the meantime, countries like Russia have every reason to continue broadening and deepening western rifts through malicious hybrid influences, infiltrating the West through the dissemination of fake news and exploitation of social media. When you don't have a positive narrative to offer and you can't stand any taller, you nourish yourself by using your opponent's weaknesses through efforts to fragment and divide him. Namely, to take them down a notch. We will need a strong recovery of our undermined collective self-confidence in order to heal the wounds that have been opened up in the western model of liberal internationalism. And this effort has to start with our expelling the demons that are already within the walls and rendering domestic and foreign policy two sides of the same coin.

That said, until 24 February Europe was essentially a continent with a one-sided economic orientation, internal divisions and weak leadership, with only soft power and no common resources for a defence policy. Of course, it is the war in Ukraine that is weaving a serious subversion, as Europe, to its own surprise, is realising that its security is not a given and that its energy dependence on Russia is not without consequences. As a result, for the first time a unified EU policy is being implemented, and it may well be maintained, in combination with the UK and the US, against Russia. Britain remains active on the European stage despite Brexit. At the same time, Germany's decision to make huge defence investments is pushing it towards transcendence, soon to become a more "complete" power, going beyond the economic sector. Another matter for discussion is the extent to which this will lead it to adopt a balanced economic model, in which it will export less and spend more or more broadly if the Eurozone moves towards fiscal consolidation.

In any event, the new reality favours a single European strategy, overturning the leadership deficit that encouraged energy dependence and Russia's aspirations, while perpetuating the insecurity of Eastern European countries. The latter, beyond

3 Allison, G., 2020. The new spheres of influence: sharing the globe with other great powers. *Foreign Aff.*, 99, p.30.

4 <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/en/newsroom/news/gabriel-spiegel/1212494>

NATO, had rushed to sign bilateral defence agreements with a more-than-willing U.S., inaugurating a parallel but substantial NATO. In recent years, statements by European leaders have highlighted the need for a common defence to complement NATO, implying that neither national armies nor NATO suffice for collective security. Although military analysts estimate that this would take up to a decade, current events promote such actions, which would constitute a serious step towards the deepening and relative autonomy of Europe, although it is not certain whether and how they will be implemented. Overall, we can conclude that, in the medium term, a united Europe will grow stronger. Regarding this winter, God help us if, as Europeans, we fail to bear the short-term burdens of increased electricity and natural gas costs. This is the minimum collective price of freedom that we are called upon to pay in order to avoid a major defeat by an inferior and declining nation-state, breaking the bonds of harmful one-sided energy dependence that was maintained against an aggressive regime, without the presence of adequate conditions of a healthy approach and peaceful interdependence.

Especially with regard to Greece and its major national security issue (Turkey), Germany will be less inclined towards neutrality in crisis management in the region and in Europe's "near abroad", a development that concerns Turkey itself. Although Ankara will remain in a revisionist mindset, Berlin's shift away from the paradigm and in the mindset of equal distances, the recovery of Europe's undermined collective self-confidence, and the prioritisation of the concepts of national sovereignty, international law, and moral commitments will provide Greece with an additional bulwark, along with the possible launch of a restructuring of EU-Turkey relations following the upcoming Turkish elections, reversing the trajectory of Europe's footprint — which is still worryingly anaemic — and reclaiming its influence anew, along with its ability to promote stability with a greater degree of effectiveness, through active intervention and in the context of forging a comprehensive partnership that will benefit Turkey's European orientation and its multidimensional foreign policy; a far cry from window dressing politics or recycling a transactional relationship, which, *inter alia*, will include — through commitments, conditionalities, and transatlantic safeguards — the process of normalising relations between the two countries. It should be highlighted that such a development — favourable for Greece, which will be called upon to claim joint ownership — will occur only if the Turkish leadership chooses a new Western-oriented course, where it will be mainly the U.S. regulating Turkish revisionism on an autonomous, but not anti-hegemonic, and satisfactorily western-centered trajectory as regards its final balance (especially in a number of critical geographical areas, where Turkey's role in weakening Russia in the medium term remains pivotal: the Black Sea, South Caucasus, Central Asia, and the Middle East). Currently, they are justifiably still concerned about what may occur in a post-Erdogan Turkey, if some form of synthesis is not achieved between secularists and Islamists.

GREECE AND DOMESTIC POLICY: ATTITUDES AND OUTLOOKS

Returning to Greek foreign policy, in the face of the Hellenic Republic's organic position and renewed commitment within the Euroatlantic community of values and interests, obligations arise pursuant to its active participation and shared responsibility in both the EU and NATO. However, bearing in mind the culture of Greek society, its historically suspicious attitude towards the West, and the degree of Russian penetration, domestic political processes are far from being the poor relative of a national high strategy. Therefore, precisely because the stakes were at a historical high, the Greek government did not exhaust the scope for seeking differentiated forms of national understanding, always looking to forge the optimum common denominator of consensus, so that, to the degree possible, the messages and relevant documentation on provided by the dominant political powers for Greek society are crystal clear, unadulterated, and set out in layman's terms.

At the same time, the main opposition party faced a major foreign policy issue in terms of exploiting the political and electoral behaviour of a portion of public opinion, ignoring the harmful precedent for the country's national security issues signalled by a possible neutral stance on the part of the Hellenic Republic, along with the messages Moscow and Ankara would receive from such a policy, forgetting that, a few years earlier, it was their party that, as a government, consigned to the past the Greek anti-Americanism that ideologically originated from the Left. In the face of the new reality that the country's national security strategy needs to take into consideration, PASOK-KINAL's progressive outlook must include a plan of governance that will act as a bulwark against a number of multi-factor crises that will increasingly test the achievement of virtuous alignments between domestic and foreign policy; both within the new Europe that is gradually emerging and in the need to establish a much more resilient Greek society with fewer inequalities, in view of the future that, due to Greece's geographical position, is rapidly approaching.

THE RENEWED ROLE OF GREEK PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

At the same time, with an emphasis on public diplomacy, Greece must also take the war in Ukraine seriously with regard to the role played by international public opinion, enhancing its toolbox with renewed and open public diplomacy that is flexibly adapted to the new reality, and utilising all available modern means, and especially international communication and all its channels. As was proven in the case of Ukraine, its role is critical in disseminating national positions and “connecting” the tree of Greek-Turkish relations (unfortunately, even within the EU there are still several member states that still do not recognise our problems with Turkey) to the forest of the central issue of our time, aiming, among other things, to promote Greece’s aspirations and highlight its contribution to international public opinion, not as a consumer, but as a provider of security and stability in its broader regional subsystem, multiplying Greece’s image and influence through the planning and execution of strategies for their most fruitful communication, synchronised with the tools of digital diplomacy, without underestimating the role of conventional methods that will provide grist to the mill of revitalising and updating the national message.

To this end, looking towards the multi-centric world, the priority of Greek public diplomacy and the Greek brand will be to formulate different versions of messages in layman’s terms, both as regards its national paradigm in historical time and the strategic goals of its foreign policy, in its capacity as provider and guarantor of stability and security, and as regards the timely interception of Turkey’s (political and legal) attempts to manipulate the international community, making the national narrative more accessible, understandable, open, and interconnected with its big picture and regional refractions, including in its design and implementation professionals with influence in shaping international public opinion or, alternatively, in multi-targeted national audiences.

In other words, the lesson in public diplomacy from the Greek Prime Minister to the members of the U.S. Congress (May 2022) must become reform with organic continuity that will include strategic communication in the toolbox of policy implemented for the Greece’s national security. Experience has shown that successful officials in corresponding positions, with the necessary pluralism, are accompanied by creative minds, intellectual elasticity, and tactical flexibility. At the end of the day and in the information age, they will continue to seek what Joseph Nye underlined: “The future of power is a

matter of whose story wins”⁵. With a smart narrative, attractive power, and renewed persuasion, highlighting its competitive advantages through available digital data, the identity of the Hellenic Republic continues to unlock doors and release dynamics within and beyond European borders, from elites to the masses, from national to non-state actors. All that remains is for the right bunch of safety-keys to be selected, depending on the use.

5 Nye, J.S., 2014. The information revolution and soft power. *Current History*.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS ON GREEK FOREIGN POLICY: THE CASE OF THE WESTERN BALKANS AND TURKEY

In conclusion, the clear position Greece took served both its national interest and its national security strategy, as well as the role the country is being called upon to play in its region. For example, our country's relations with Russia will not deteriorate further due to the largely symbolic contribution of defence material to Ukraine, which is also part of the process of garnering allied solidarity, both on a US and an EU level (bilateral and EU). With renewed emphasis on the intra-European balance of power and community negotiation, in the face of both national security issues that concern Turkey and the broader sector of European defence, with Greece's desire to relaunch the endeavour and its emerging recognition as a front-line member state in the medium term, starting in its own neighbourhood and paying increased attention to its Balkan perimeter, namely, in the area where the prolonged sense of uncertainty regarding the future of the Western Balkans remains pervasive, the period during which the EU could pretend to be enlarging and the countries of the region could pretend to be reforming should have already ended. With the continued lack of clear commitment to and prioritisation of the EU enlargement policy, in the medium term, the heavy legacy of the past alongside the rise of nationalism, as a tool for the survival of weak nation-states in the midst of a fragile regional balance of power, will become unsustainable and, in the end, will collapse. Meanwhile, Europe is losing the battle for credibility and consistency, with no coherent plan for managing the crises in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo besides its classic recipe for enlargement. With their European perspective shaken and undermined, and democratic regression visible to the naked eye, the anaemic reformist local leaderships (their legitimacy downgraded in equal measure to the allure of the EU) are also facing a period of renewed return to geopolitical jostling and national rivalries among third powers (Russia, Turkey, China, Gulf countries) for spheres influence.

Going deeper and more substantially into the issues of security and stability in the Western Balkans, Greece is being called upon to return to its natural space in terms of stronger national self-confidence, proactive responsibility, and gravitational pull, serving its national interest on a bilateral and regional level, as well as the interest of its partners and allies on both sides of the Atlantic, free from the burdens of a defensive mentality and phobias, gaining credibility through a clear and coherent plan to manage the ongoing crises.

For example, Athens, in its capacity as a regional power and as a representative of the Euro-Atlantic West, should have pro-actively chosen to "move forward", acting as the main mediator between Skopje and Sofia to resolve their differences and initiate accession negotiations for North Macedonia. On the other hand, Greece's appointment of a special envoy for the Western Balkans and its initiative for the accession of the Western Balkans to the EU in 2033 are seen as steps in the right direction. However, broader strategic coordination and unification of forces will be required with EU member states (among others) that share the same plan for the democracy-security/stability-prosperity triptych.

Lastly, the new reality that will strengthen the footprint of the Balkan dimension of Greek foreign policy includes both the energy and the broader geopolitical enhancement of Alexandroupoli, through the presence of strategic infrastructure on a national and regional level, with Greece being upgraded to an energy provider and natural gas transmission hub, both towards the Balkans and more broadly towards Eastern European countries. It is worth noting that since 2014, following the crisis in Ukraine and with the Russian-Turkish pendulum still in full swing – through tactical retreats, from quasi-alliance to quasi-confrontation – the U.S. has been obligated to prepare for multiple scenarios, reducing their future dependence on Turkey regarding the critical role of the Dardanelles, designing and implementing a second line of defence, this time on Greek territory, a development that currently favours the regional balance of power and the interplay of national and transatlantic interests even more, leading to the strengthening of Greece's position in the Aegean and the Eastern Mediterranean.



ADDENDUM

In conclusion, in the context of everything that didn't happen in the years preceding the invasion, what was missing on the level of the national and European public sphere was greater self-criticism regarding the mistakes of the West itself (USA, EU) with regard to Russia, both in the 1990s (ignoring the need to create conditions for changing Russia's outlook on its future course, while rapidly promoting the "global liberal class" to the detriment of "geopolitical realism"), before Putin's rise to power, and after 2008 and, mainly, 2014 and the crisis in Ukraine, without the above .under any circumstances constituting even a shred of legitimisation for the Russian president to proceed with "correcting" history and denying Ukraine's right to exist as a nation-state. At the end of the day, it remains essential that one of the characteristics that distinguishes developed democracies from authoritarian regimes is that the former learn from their mistakes and correct them, preserving their institutional memory, especially as pertaining to the study of history and geography, as we are continually judged by the way we perceive the present in order to build the future. If we are to be the masters -- and not the servants -- of our shared destiny, we cannot put our unfinished business on hold.

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WHAT'S CHANGED SINCE FEBRUARY 24TH? A WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY FOR GREEK FOREIGN POLICY

The Russian invasion of Ukraine, besides rejuvenating and upgrading a brain-dead NATO in the security architecture of Europe, triggered an unprecedented policy shift on the part of the EU, with both Germany's decision on equipment and more broadly. Belying the Kremlin's assessments, a collective European front was created and is being maintained in order to impose sanctions on Russia. Furthermore, the new reality favours a single European strategy that will now link economic and security issues, reversing the leadership deficit and the absence of collective defence that exacerbated energy dependence and encouraged Russia's strategy. For the Hellenic Republic, serving both its national interests and the core of its value paradigm (national sovereignty, international law, moral commitments), in conjunction with the network of historical, ethnic, and religious ties with Ukraine itself, rightly

led to a clear position in favour of Kyiv, far from the "grey area" neutrality so harmful to a pro-status quo country. All the more so when both Greece and Cyprus are neighbours with Turkey, a country that consistently plies a revisionist course with a transactional outlook on international relations, now in its capacity as the third pole between the West and Eurasia, and with its ambitions for conquest in the Aegean and the Eastern Mediterranean, playing the parts of regional protector and pivotal naval force. Bearing in mind the new geopolitical reality and the ongoing challenges to the liberal international order, Athens now expects the EU — and Berlin in particular — to show proactive support against Turkey's claims and to definitively abandon the rationale of neutrality and that of the mediator maintaining equal distance, alongside the need — a far cry from the policy of "window

dressing", and looking towards the future — for a broader restructuring of EU-Turkey relations. At the same time, Greek public diplomacy will have to capitalise on the use of strategic communication by highlighting its contribution to international public opinion, not as a consumer, but as a provider of security and stability in its broader regional subsystem, including the Western Balkans. With Greece enhanced through Alexandroupoli, it is being called upon to return to its natural space in terms of stronger national self-confidence, proactive responsibility, and anchoring capacity, serving both its national interest on a bilateral and regional level, as well as the interests of its partners and allies; the role of the main mediator between Skopje and Sofia, for example, could be one of Athens' priorities.