



## EXAMINING THE ISSUES BETWEEN TURKEY AND GREECE BY CONSIDERING SUGGESTIONS FROM CITIZENS OF BOTH COUNTRIES THROUGH COMMUNICATION

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### **Abstract:**

Although the Turkish and Greek peoples have lived together for many years, they have also had to live and share problematic periods as a result of the policies of their governments. The two peoples have fought wars in the past, but have always come to each other's aid in difficult times. Due to unresolved problems and harsh rhetoric from politicians, two geographically very close neighbors had sometimes drifted apart. In the survey conducted simultaneously in Turkey and Greece, the two communities explained in detail the issues on which they agree or disagree in Turkish-Greek relations and their suggestions for solutions to existing problems. The results of this research, which reveals the perspectives of the peoples of the two neighboring countries on Turkish-Greek relations with a scientific approach and an objective point of view, will present a different vision to both societies and the governments of both countries.

**Keywords:** communication, Greece, Turkey, Turkish-Greek relations, Turkish-Greek friendship

### **1. Introduction**

Turkey and Greece are two very close neighbors. The two societies have lived together for many years, shared a common history, and produced a common culture. Therefore, the Turkish and Greek peoples share many similar characteristics. Nevertheless, if we try to question Turkish-Greek relations, we are confronted with a very intense set of disagreements and problems in which historical, geographical, and ethnic factors are at the forefront.

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Turkish-Greek relations have two different histories according to two different claims. If the Greeks are the continuation of the Byzantine (Eastern Roman) Empire as they claim, we can talk about a 10-hundred-year history of relations based on 1071, the date of the Turkish conquest of Anatolia. If the other claim, namely the emergence of today's Greece as an independent state in 1830, is accepted as the beginning, it is possible to talk about a relationship between the two countries that has been going on for two centuries (Kalelioğlu, 2008:107).

Chronologically, the Ottoman rule in Greece began with the conquest of Dimetoka in 1361 and reached its largest point with the conquest of the Peloponnese in 1461. This period is called *Protı Turkokratia* (the establishment of the first Ottoman rule in Greece) by historians (Kayapınar, 2002, İnci, 2010). After the great conquest in 1453, the Ottoman Empire took action to seize the rest of the Greek world. The small Trabzon Empire, which was established on the southeast coast of the Black Sea after the Fourth Crusade, joined the Ottoman lands in 1461. Rhodes was captured in 1522, Chios and Naxos in 1566, Cyprus in 1571, and Crete, known as the 'Big Island', in 1669 after a long siege of twenty years (Clogg, 1997: 22).

## 2. General Overview

### 2.1 Turkish-Greek Relations in the Historical Process

The two societies had a harmonious relationship until the Greek uprising of 1821. After the conquest of Greece, Sultan Mehmet II was very tolerant towards the Athenians, accepting their demands for basic human rights and granting them tax immunity. What pleased the Athenians the most were the privileges granted especially to the Orthodox clergy (Sander, 1987).

The Hellenes living under Ottoman rule enjoyed greater privileges than any other ethnic group living within the Ottoman borders. The Orthodox Patriarchate, which Mehmet the Conqueror granted wide powers and the right to speak (Gürel, 1993-22), had a greater sanction and prestige than it had during the most powerful period of Byzantium. The Greeks claimed that they represented all Orthodox Christendom in Europe and Asia and that they had the right to speak on their behalf (Karpas, 1985). Greek subjects, who lived in much more peaceful and prosperous conditions under Ottoman rule than other ethnic groups, were able to establish their councils that met free from the interference of state officials (Bölükbaşı, 2004).

The Greek Christians who were recruited to important positions in the Ottoman Empire through the *devshirme* method served the Ottoman Empire while maintaining their religion (Volkan & Itzkovvitz, 2002). In the government, the officials of the translation department were generally selected from the members of the Greek trade community (Sander, 1987).

The currents of thought imported from the West to the Ottoman-dominated Balkans pushed the Greeks to fight for independence in 1821. The national movement in Greek society manifested itself towards the end of the eighteenth century. The Greek

uprising against the Ottoman Empire, which was militarily declining and unable to adapt technological advances to its army, resulted in the emergence of an independent state in the 1830s. The Treaty of Edirne signed on September 14, 1829, which ended the Ottoman-Russian War, obliged the Ottoman Empire to recognize the independence of Greece (Armaoğlu, 2007). This was perhaps not the first national movement to develop in Eastern Europe, but it was the first in a non-Christian environment, namely the Ottoman Empire (Clogg, 1997: 32-33). The independence of Greece started a new process in the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire. After this event, national minorities supported by some European states and Balkan nations living within the Ottoman borders gained their independence by taking advantage of the weakening of the Ottoman Empire (Sander, 1987). As the Balkans and Anatolia painfully transitioned from an empire to a nation-state era, Greek and Turkish national identities were mutually accepted by each other.

Historically, between 1923 and 2013, Turkish-Greek relations followed an upward and downward trajectory. This process has been seen as an "endless cold war", as many scholars have described it. This situation between Greece and Turkey, which has lasted from the 20th century to the present day, has been a matter of great concern for political and military leaders at the regional and international levels, and proposals for solutions have failed to produce a lasting result (Koukoudakis, 2015).

## **2.2 Occupation of İzmir and Megali Idea**

The occupation of İzmir by the Greek army was one of the turning points in Turkish-Greek relations. Since the Turkish rulers knew very well the attitude of the Greeks, they demanded from the allied countries that the Greeks should not participate in any occupation of Anatolia, but their requests were not taken into consideration (Turan, 1996). In the Paris Peace negotiations, it was decided to apply Article 7 of the Armistice of Mudros for the whole of Anatolia. On May 5, 1919, Greece, commissioned by the Allied states, landed its army protected by British, French, and American warships (Kayıran & Metintaş, 2018) in İzmir. On May 15, 1919, during the occupation of İzmir, undisciplined and aggressive Greek soldiers entered the Muslim neighborhoods of the city and persecuted the people for two days. It is claimed that the Greek soldiers, who continued to shoot for a long time despite the waving of the white flag from the barracks, killed 2000 Turks (Akşin, 2021).

Even before the Greeks entered İzmir, they clearly stated that they did not come for temporary occupation. The real aim of the Greeks was to incorporate Western Anatolia into the "Greater Greece" they would establish on both sides of the Aegean Sea and thus realize their "Megali Idea" (Great Ideal or Great Idea), that is, to revive the glorious Christian Byzantine Empire with its same splendor (Aybars, 2012).

The basic idea advocated by the "Megali Idea" is to re-establish the Byzantine Empire and the Pontus Greek State, to recapture all the lands that Alexander the Great had conquered, to revive the Great Hellenic Empire, and to make Istanbul the capital of this empire (Yalçın, 2017). Although the Megali Idea became an ideology in the mid-nineteenth century, the Greeks trace its origins to the fall of İstanbul. This view is a pan-

Hellenistic ideology that aims to bring to life the ideal of re-conquering İstanbul and re-establishing the Byzantine Empire (Volkan & Itzkovvitz, 2002). The person who gave this name to the concept of Megali Idea is the Greek politician, Ioannis Kolettis. Kolettis, in his speech at the Greek Assembly, claimed that the Greeks were not limited to those living within the borders of the kingdom, stated that the residents of other places belonging to the Greek race were also Greeks, and defined Athens as the capital of the great Greek kingdom and Istanbul as the great capital (Kalelioğlu, 2008).

After the Turkish army entered the city on September 9, 1922, the Greek army, which had occupied İzmir for three and a half years, was expelled from İzmir within 15 days (Karpas, 2021). The Greek army entered Izmir with the slogan of Megali Idea, but when he left the city at the end of the defeat, a new concept was added to the history of Greece: "Asia Minor Disaster". On September 19, not a single Greek soldier remained in Western Anatolia, Istanbul, and Eastern Thrace were given to Turkey with the Armistice of Mudanya (Kırmid 2021), which ended the war that lasted more than three years between Turkey and Greece.

### **2.3 Problems Inherited from the Past**

As a result of the "Convention and Protocol on the Exchange of Turkish and Greek Populations" signed on January 30, 1923, during the Lausanne Peace Conference negotiations, it was decided that Orthodox Greeks in Turkey and Muslims in Greece would be exchanged and that the Greek population of Istanbul and the Muslim population of Western Thrace would be excluded from this exchange and would be considered "settled".

However, this population exchange increased economic and social problems in both countries, and the tension caused by the exchange led to serious political problems between the two countries that continue to this day (Değerli, 2006). This massive and unprecedented exchange of people (Pallis, 1997), homogenized the populations of both countries and ended hundreds of years of peaceful coexistence between the two communities (Hale, 2003).

Although foreign analysts portray Greek-Turkish relations as an ongoing feud between historical rivals, the history of relations between the two countries is much more meaningful than this description and includes periods of constant deviation (Rumelili, 2004). The most important steps towards reconciliation between Turkey and Greece were taken by the famous leaders of the two countries, Atatürk and Venizelos, in 1930, when the two peoples were not even ready to bury the hatchet in the ground. Both Venizelos, the leader of Greece, and Atatürk, the leader of Turkey, were aware that the ongoing hostility between the two countries would adversely affect their national interests. At the same time, they saw the ambitions of their neighbors Bulgaria and further afield Italy as a threat to their countries' security interests (Bahcheli, 2021). Both countries also needed to feel secure to become more powerful in the Balkans. Without peace between the two countries, they would be vulnerable to possible attacks from neighboring Slavic countries. The Turkish-Greek rapprochement would bring peace to the Balkans and

allow both countries to focus on their internal affairs (Uğurlu, 2012). In the 30s, when the Turkish-Greek rapprochement was taking place, Greek leader Venizelos made a great effort to convince his people. The reason for the importance Venizelos attached to this rapprochement between the two countries was also the expectation of securing Greece's borders against any attempts to change the status quo that might arise in the world and the region. His statements emphasizing that Greece's territories were sufficient for the Greek people were also revealing this (Erdem, 2009).

#### **2.4 The Impact of the Cyprus Problem on Relations between the Two Countries**

Atatürk welcomed Venizelos' efforts to strengthen relations between Greece and Turkey. The treaties signed in 1930 during Venizelos' visit to Turkey contributed significantly to the development of Greek-Turkish relations. Although Venizelos lost the elections in Greece in 1933 and fell into opposition, on January 12, 1934, shortly before the signing of the Balkan Pact, he nominated Atatürk, whom he considered the real founder of the Balkan Pact, for the Nobel Peace Prize (Çakmak, 2008).

With the end of the Second World War and the beginning of the Cold War, both states found themselves in the same alliance. Greece and Turkey's NATO membership in 1952 helped both countries to consolidate their orientation toward the West and facilitate a possible security partnership between them. However, this rapprochement between the two countries came to an end when the Cyprus problem emerged. Many disagreements surfaced, especially over minorities and borders (Grigoriadis, 2020). From the mid-1950s onwards, disagreements over Cyprus escalated and the thaw in relations between the two countries turned tense again. After the collapse of the partnership government of the Greek and Turkish communities in Cyprus in 1963, relations between Turkey and Greece seriously deteriorated. In particular, relations between the two states took a turn for the worst with Turkey's military intervention in Cyprus in July 1974 in response to the coup d'état of the Yannidis junta. The problem of the continental shelf in the Aegean and related legal issues, as well as other long-standing problems regarding the treatment of each other's minorities, caused further tensions in Greek-Turkish relations (Bahcheli, 2021). Turkish-Greek relations, which had become tenser before the Cyprus Peace Operation, came to the brink of war with the intervention of the Turkish army.

The reasons for the Turkish-Greek enmity should be sought in the turbulent movements of the 20th century. From the First World War and the Cold War period until the fall of the Iron Curtain, Turkish-Greek relations have always shown ups and downs, and the fact that both countries were NATO members did not diminish the existing hostilities. In other words, Turkish-Greek relations in the second half of the 20th century can be viewed from a cold war perspective (Corbic, 2020).

Today, relations between Turkey and Greece have entered a spiral of crises due to negative developments on issues such as the delimitation of territorial waters in the Aegean Sea, the determination of airspace in the Aegean Sea, the determination of the FIR line, the issue of whether the Eastern Aegean Islands can be armed, the debate over who has sovereignty over certain islands and islets, and of course minority rights

(Kırlıdökme 2016). In the last few years, however, there have been positive changes in the treatment of minorities in both countries (Çarkoğlu & Kirişçi, 2004).

## 2.5 True Friends

Although there have been many problems that have led to discord between Turkey and Greece in the historical process, the disasters have caused the two communities to forget the past crises and come closer to each other. For example, when the Great Marmara Earthquake occurred on August 17, 1999, which caused the death of thousands of people, despite the tense political relations between the governments of the two countries, the Greeks were the first people to come to help the Turkish people (Berberakis, 2020). A very short time later, on September 7, 1999, a huge earthquake took place in Athens, and this time the Turks were the first to come to help the Greeks. Many Greeks encountered Turks for the first time during the August 1999 Earthquake, and this development caused a difference in the perception of "Turks" in Greek society (Demirözü, 2017). The rapprochement between the Turkish-Greek peoples goes back much further, to 1939. Greece was among the countries that came to the aid of Turkey in the earthquake that caused great destruction in Erzincan and which foreign newspapers called the "Turkish tragedy". An aid campaign was launched in the neighboring country, and around 700,000 Greeks contributed to the aid campaign (Keser, 2010).

The Second World War also played an active role in the rapprochement of the people of the two countries. During the years of the Second World War, Greece, whose country was occupied, suffered from hunger and famine. It was very difficult for international aid to reach the country due to the blockade imposed by the UK (Halıcı, 2015). Western states were worried that the aid to be sent would not reach the Greeks in need, and they did not take action despite Germany's guarantee on this issue (Keser, 2010). Aid to Greece in these difficult days came from Turkey again. The Kurtuluş ship, which departed from Istanbul on October 13, 1941, delivered 50 thousand tons of food to the Port of Piraeus two days later (Erdem & Kalemli 2011). The ship Kurtuluş, which set out with 36 personnel on Monday, January 18, 1942, to deliver aid to Greece for the sixth time, sank on the rocks around Marmara Island at around 04:00 am due to heavy fog (Keser, 2010). After the tragic end of Kurtuluş's sinking, this time Dumlupınar Ship sailed to Piraeus 6 times and brought aid to the Greek people (Halıcı, 2015).

After the 7.7 magnitude earthquake that occurred in Kahramanmaraş at 04:17 on the morning of 6 February 2023, Greece was again one of the countries that sent the first aid team to Turkey. Greece started mobilization to support earthquake victims, organized aid campaigns immediately sent rescue teams to the earthquake area, and sent humanitarian aid in trucks (Euronews, 2023). Despite the strained relations with the recent harsh statements of the governments, the Turks and the Greeks side by side, heartily and earnestly tried to help the Turks who were under the buildings destroyed in the earthquake.

## 2.6 Hope for the Future

The balance established in the Aegean with the Lausanne Treaty accepted in 1923 was satisfactory for both Turkey and Greece until the early 1970s. After the 1970s, the differences of opinion between the two countries on the Aegean deepened and turned into conflict. The Greeks see the Aegean as a Greek sea, while the Turks expect a fair share of the resources in the Aegean (Gürel, 1996).

The burden of history and the ghosts of the past are one of the most important reasons for the lack of trust between Greece and Turkey. The hostilities from history also play an important role in the mutual distrust between these two countries. Greeks and Turks are classic examples of rival peoples, such as the French and Germans, or the Russians and Germans. These skeptical attitudes, which have deep roots in both the general view of society and the media, also influence and guide governments from time to time.

Many observers argue that mutual suspicion should be reduced as a first step to establishing peace and stability on both sides of the Aegean, but this is a time-consuming and long-term process (Tsnakos, 1991).

According to some interpretations, the improvement of Greek-Turkish relations is important not only for the interests of these countries, but also for the interests of the whole region, and this improvement is only possible if it turns into an agreement that will benefit from all possible synergies in the economic, political and cultural fields (Keridis, 1999). Lysandros Tsilidis, one of the former Chairmen of the Board of HATTA (Hellenic Association of Travel & Tourist Agencies), founded in 1927 and one of the most important institutions of Greek Tourism, thinks that the two synergies will contribute greatly to Turkish and Greek tourism (Oral, 2016b). Likewise, Christos Aidonis, who served as the Minister of Health in the PASOK Government in 1980, reminded Turkey's EU membership request and claimed that Greece could give the greatest support to Turkey in this field. Stating that Greece, which spent almost seventy percent of its budget on military investments before 1999, reduced this rate to 30 percent after 1999 when relations started to improve, Aidonis reminded that this rate was 2% in European countries. The former Greek Minister argued that both countries should take advantage of the peace and reduce their defense budgets and shift these budgets to other essential areas (Oral, 2016c).

According to Greek historian Costa Carras, in 1999, Turkish Foreign Minister Ismail Cem and Greek Foreign Minister George Papandreou ushered in a very bright period in relations between the two countries, which until then had not been good at all. Carras stated that starting from that period, as a result of the positive attitude of the two foreign ministers, both Turkish and Greek societies changed. Recalling that the best change in inter-state relations is based on social change, Carras stated that he thought this *détente* was promising (Oral, 2016a).

Or, as Mehmet Ali Birand argued, the problems between Turkey and Greece are difficult to resolve, so the two nations must learn to live with them (Birand, 1987).

### 3. Method and Sample

This research, the findings of which constitute the subject of this article, aims to determine how the people of the two countries view and approach historical issues, current problems, and Turkish-Greek relations. Within the scope of the research, a questionnaire consisting of 31 different questions, including demographic questions, was prepared and all texts were translated verbatim into Greek. The survey, which was conducted simultaneously in Turkey and Greece, revealed the subjective opinion of both communities on the issues between the two countries by answering the same questions.

Participants in the study were asked to answer the questions asked to them by choosing one of the answers "Strongly agree", "Agree", "Undecided", "Disagree" and "Strongly disagree". In this quantitative study, which lasted for 90 days in 2020, the online survey technique was used while reaching the data. 495 Turks and 324 Greeks participated in the research. The sample in Turkey was selected from the provinces of İzmir, Ankara, Bursa, Isparta, and Aydın, and the participants from Greece were selected from Athens, Thessaloniki, Piraeus, Chios, and Rhodes Island.

Among the 495 Turks who participated in the study, 400 were male and 95 were female. Among the 324 Greek participants, 165 were men and 159 were women. While 70% of the Turks participating in the survey stated that they had been to Greece before, the rate of Greek participants who had visited Turkey was 61%. In the research, 31% of Turks answered "Yes" to the question of whether they have a close friend from a neighboring country, while this rate is 47% in Greece. Those who constitute the 65 and over age group of the sample are 17% in Turks and 12% in Greeks. Those who make up the age group of 50-65 are 46% for Turks, and 36% for Greeks. Those who make up the 35-50 age group are 32% for Turks, and 36% for Greeks. Those between the ages of 25-35 are 3% for Turks and 12% for Greeks. Those between the ages of 15-25 are 2% for Turks and 4% for Greeks.

### 4. Findings

#### 4.1 Are Turkey and Greece Two Friendly Countries?

In the historical process, it is possible to see a mutual distrust in the social subconscious of the two societies, which have come close to each other from time to time and from time to time on the brink of war. For example, it is possible to see the Turkish saying "*No friend from a Greek, no hide from a bear*" versus the Greek saying "*No friend from a Turk because he stabs you in the back*" (Özsüer, 2012).

In the survey, the people of both countries were asked whether, as of today, Turkey and Greece can be considered 'two friendly countries'. While 12% of Turks strongly agree that the two countries are friends, this rate is only 2% among Greeks. The rate of those who "agree" is 33% among Turks and 16% among Greeks. The rate of those who strongly disagree with this statement is 2% among Turks and 15% among Greeks. The rate of undecided respondents is 29% in Turkey and 23% in Greece. In other words,



while 26% of Turks do not believe that Turkey and Greece are two friendly countries, this rate is more than half, 59%, in Greece. In light of this result, it is noteworthy that the tendency of Turks to perceive Greek society as friends is much higher than the rate of Greek society perceiving Turks as friends.

Do the two communities believe that their countries will be better friends in the future? While 45% of Turks believe that the two countries are friends today, 51% of Turks believe that the two countries will be better friends in the future. Similarly, while 18% of Greeks believe that the two countries are friends today, the percentage of Greeks who are hopeful about the future increases significantly to 43%.

These data show that the belief that the two countries will be much better friends in the future is high in both societies. Especially Greeks have higher expectations for the future in this regard.

#### **4.2 Turkish and Greek Perception in Social Subconscious**

In both cultures, those who do evil to their homeland are referred to as "*Greek seeds*" or "*Turkish seeds*" (Özsüer, 2015). Although it is promising that the high school history textbooks in Greece revise the narratives of the events that took place between the two countries in the past and adopt a more objective attitude (Özsüer, 2018), this situation shows that the concepts of friendship and trust are not very strong in the social subconscious of societies.

In the survey, when asked 'If your child, sister, brother, relative or close friend wants to marry someone from a neighboring country, would you approve this decision?' 76% of Greeks stated that they would approve of such a decision, while this rate rises to 81% among Turks. Only 1% of Turks say that they would strongly not approve of a family member marrying a Greek. This rate rises to 3.5% among Greeks. Both rates show that Turks are slightly more moderate and less prejudiced in their approach to the Greeks. When asked whether they had heard positive opinions about the people of the neighboring country from their parents when they were children, the responses are important in terms of revealing the social subconscious. 36% of Greeks stated that they did not listen to positive things about Turks and 7% stated that they strongly did not. Among Turks, 31% stated that they did not listen to any positive speech and 6% stated that they strongly did not listen. 28% of Greeks and 30% of Turks stated that they had no opinion on this issue.

The special ties between the two countries from the past cause the societies to develop a special sensitivity towards each other. In particular, Turkish and Greek families, who had to leave their homelands with the population exchange, have a special awareness of what is happening in these two countries where their ancestors once lived. The press also pays attention to this sensitivity while determining its news policy. For example, after Turkey, Greece is the country that shows the most interest in the elections to be held in Turkey in 2023. And almost every day, the media in Greece devotes 20-30 minutes of space to news about Turkey and analyzes Turkish-Greek, Turkish-US, Turkish-EU, Turkish-EU, Turkish-NATO relations, and Turkey's foreign policy.

(Berberakis, 2023) It is possible to say that news about Greece is also frequently published in the Turkish media. The public's interest in this news is not small. According to the findings of the research, 76% of Turks state that they follow the news about Greece published in the press, while this rate is 66% among Greeks.

### **4.3 Are the Two Societies Similar to Each Other?**

Turks and Greeks are similar societies in terms of social values and behaviors, traditions, and cultural characteristics. Since they have lived together for many years, there are many similar dishes, dances, and songs in the cultures of the two societies and similar words in their languages. However, despite all these similarities, the two societies have excluded each other and considered each other different while forming their national identities (Özsüer, 2012). In the research, when asked whether the two societies are similar, it was revealed that this view is more dominant among Turks in light of the answers given. While 91% of Turks responded positively to this question, the rate of Greeks who believe that the two peoples are similar is 67%. Do the fact that Turks and Greeks have lived together in the past and their cultural similarities create a special sympathy for each other in both societies? While 31% of Turks answered 'Yes, my people have a special sympathy for Greeks', this rate is slightly higher among Greeks. 34% of the Greek respondents think that Greek society has a special sympathy for Turks.

Due to the geographical proximity between the two neighboring countries, tourism activity is high. According to statistics before the Covid 19 pandemic, in 2018, approximately 781 thousand tourists from Turkey visited Greece and around 665 thousand tourists from Greece visited Turkey. In 2019, the number of Turkish tourists traveling to Greece reached 789 thousand, while the number of tourists from Greece to Turkey reached 820 thousand (MFA, 2023). So, how do the two communities feel about the hospitality they receive during mutual visits? Among Greeks, 87% think that Turkey is very friendly and helpful to Greek tourists, while 76% of Turks think that the people of the neighboring country treat Turkish tourists very well.

When the respondents were asked about examples of social solidarity between the people of the two countries in the past, 86% of Turks and 87% of Greeks said that they were aware of these events. In another question, 93% of Turks and 85% of Greeks responded positively when asked whether they would like to take part in aid campaigns in case of a natural disaster in a neighboring country.

### **4.4 Fear of War**

When relations between the two countries deteriorate and their quarrels intensify, the possibility of another war between the two countries immediately appears on the agenda of both societies. In the last 50 years, disagreements between the two NATO members have brought Turkey and Greece to the brink of war three times (AP, 2022). For example, Evangelos Apostolakis, a former Greek defense minister and Honorary Chief of the General Staff, told the press that "*the Greek people have responded to challenges throughout history. Everyone, our friends and the opposition, should be aware of the risk of war*" (Hürriyet,

2022). The harsh statements of state officials of both countries that evoke war often appear in the media.

When the respondents were asked whether they think that the deteriorating relations between Turkey and Greece could lead to a war, it is noticeable that Greek society has a much higher level of war anxiety. Turks, on the other hand, give a very low probability of a war breaking out. When asked whether they are worried about the possibility of war between the two countries, 3% of Turks and 19% of Greeks answered 'Strongly agree'. Those who 'Agree' that war is possible are 13% in Turkey and 45% in Greece. In other words, the Greek public's concern about the possibility of war is 4 times higher than the Turkish public's concern in this regard.

While 18% of the Turkish respondents answered 'strongly disagree' with the possibility of war, this rate is 4% among the Greek respondents. The percentage of 'I disagree' responses to the same question is 58% among Turkish respondents, i.e. very high. The same rate is 17% for the Greeks. The undecided rate is 8% for Turks and 15% for Greeks.

In addition to the historically unresolved problems between Turkey and Greece, various conflicts remain chaotic after the Second World War, such as the status of Cyprus, access to hydrocarbon resources in the Eastern Mediterranean, the air and sea borders of the Aegean islands, and the militarization of these islands (Bukan, 2022).

While the rate of Turks stating that the Islands and Continental Shelf problem is an important source of crisis between the two countries is 96%, this rate is 92% for Greeks. While the rate of Turks who stated that the Cyprus problem is another important source of the crisis is 91%, this rate is 90% for Greeks.

#### **4.5 There Is No Problem between Peoples**

There is a claim that has been said on many platforms where Turkish-Greek relations have been discussed for years. That claim says: 'There are no problems between societies, it is the political institution that produces the problems.' Do the people of the two communities believe in this view? Interestingly, this view is extremely dominant in both societies. The percentage of Greeks who strongly agree with this view is 44%, while the percentage of Turks is 42%. To the same question, 38% of Greeks and 39% of Turks answered "I agree". While the rate of those who express strongly disagree is 2% in both countries, the rate of Greeks who say 'I do not agree' is 5%, and the rate of Turks is 7%. Greeks who declared that they are undecided make up 11% of the respondents, while Turks make up 10%. So, in light of these results, we can say that both communities think very clearly that there is no problem between the people.

If Turkey or Greece have problems with another country, can the two neighboring countries become allies? 74% of Turks do not consider such a situation likely. Likewise, 70% of the Greek people do not believe that Turkey and Greece can be two allied countries. Another question of the research reveals that this distrust comes from the past. In light of the findings, both communities did not grow up listening to positive things

about each other from their families during their childhood, which explains the mutual distrust in the social subconscious.

43% of the Greeks participated in the research and 37% of the Turks stated that they grew up listening to negative things from their parents about the people of the neighboring country.

Well, who do other countries support when two neighboring countries have problems? Turkey or Greece? One of the most similar aspects of the two societies is that they both consider themselves alone and all countries "other". The expression "*The Turk has no friend but the Turk*" in Turkish is used as "*Greece is a nation without brothers*" in the Greek language (Özsüer, 2012). The answers given to this question of the research show that the expectations and hopes of the Turks in this context are quite low. 89% of Turks think that other countries will stand by Greece in case of a possible problem between the two countries. The percentage of Greeks who believe that other countries will support Turkey is 42%. In other words, most Greeks think that if they have a problem with Turkey, the world's public opinion will support their country. Turks believe that they will be alone in this context.

#### **4.6 If You Can't Be Neighbor with Your Friend, You'll Be Friend with Your Neighbor**

One of the issues that the two communities meet is the existence of a fanatical group that does not want Turkish-Greek relations to improve in both countries. The continuation of the Greco-Turkish cold war strengthens the hand of some nationalists, so they are always on the alert to take advantage of the opportunity to disrupt reconciliation attempts (Heraclides, 2006). Both societies have faced this reality. According to the results of the research, 76% of the Greek population and 67% of the Turks accept the existence of such a group in their country.

At this point, the views of Dimitris Reppas, who served as the Minister of Infrastructure, Transport, and Communications between 2009 and 2012 in the Pasok Government and later as the first Minister of Administrative Reform of Greece, are important. In his interview published in Turkey, he claimed that some foreign countries influenced the problems between the two countries, saying "*If you can't be a neighbor with your friend, you will be a friend with your neighbor*". Reppas stated that Turkish and Greek politicians should be close to each other and warned that if distance intervened, this gap would be filled by others. According to Reppas, to strengthen the relations between Turkey and Greece, opinion leaders such as artists, businessmen, and journalists should cooperate with the spirit of synergy and not push society into pessimism (Oral, 2016a). According to the research findings, there has been a great deal of participation from Turkey in Reppas' claim that foreigners have an impact on the problems between the two countries. While answering the question of whether the good relations between Turkey and Greece bother some global powers, 49% of Turks agreed with this idea, while 25% stated that they strongly agreed. While the percentage of Greeks who answered "I agree" to the same question was 32%, 9% stated that they strongly agree.

Both communities think that the editorial policies of the press organizations in their countries do not aim to strengthen the Turkish-Greek friendship. While answering the question of whether the media is making news that reinforces the relations between the two countries, 49% of the Turks stated that they did not agree with it, and 13% of them strongly disagreed. The Greeks answering the same question show a similar tendency. 40% of Greeks stated that they do not believe that the media in their country is making news that will strengthen the relations between the two countries, and 17% of them do not believe it at all. In response to this question, 24% of respondents from both countries stated that they were undecided.

The percentage of Turks who believe that the problems experienced in the past are still effective in the relations between the two countries is 71%. Among the Greeks, the rate of those who believe that the problems experienced in the past are reflected in the present is 78%. Would the relations between Turkey and Greece be better today if the Greek Army had not occupied Izmir in 1919? While 82% of Turks who answered this question stated that the proposition is correct, this rate is only 27% for Greeks.

## 5. Discussion

Similar studies were carried out before, in which the views of the Turkish and Greek peoples on the problems between the two countries were asked. This research differs from previous studies in terms of the method applied and the content of the questions. The same questions were prepared for both communities in their language and applied simultaneously. Our research is aimed not only to reveal the perspectives of the societies on the issues between the two countries but also to reveal the thoughts of Turks and Greeks about each other. Although some findings in the study are not similar, previous findings mostly support the results of our research.

For example, in a survey conducted by politic.gr in Greece in 2022, Greeks were asked whether they viewed the Turkish people as friends or enemies. According to the results of the survey, 68% of the Greeks who answered the questions stated that they saw the Turkish people as 'friends', 19% stated that they saw the Turks as the enemy, and 13% stated that they were undecided (Speaker, 2022). This rate is lower in the research whose findings are the subject of this article. The sum of those who answered yes and strongly yes to the question of whether they consider Turkey a friendly country is 18%. However, in our study, the rate of undecided people was 10% higher, which corresponds to 23% of the sample.

Research conducted by PIAR and ICAP in 1989 revealed that 81 percent of Greeks and 73 percent of Turks do not trust the other party (Hürriyet, 2000). A similar issue was questioned in our research in the question of whether the two countries could be allies. In our research, 74% of Turks and 70% of Greeks stated that they do not believe that Turkey and Greece can be two allied countries. This finding, namely the mutual distrust between the two countries, is revealed in both studies.

In a poll (Nedos, 2021) organized by the Greek European and Foreign Policy Foundation (ELIAMEP) and the Dianeosis Research Institute, Greeks and Turks were asked whether they accepted the thesis "We must find a way to live together amicably". 68.1% of Greeks and 73.5% of Turks answered "I agree / I strongly agree" to this question. The percentage of Greeks who oppose this idea is 15.6%, while the rate of Turks is 13.7%.

In the same research, the participants were asked "Are you worried about a possible military problem between Greece and Turkey?" While 70.2% of Greeks and 41.9% of Turks said yes to this question, 16.6% of Greeks and 41.8% of Turks stated that they did not have such a concern. The same situation, namely the Greeks' concern about the outbreak of war between the two countries, shows itself in our research. The probability of a war between the two countries is 16% for Turks, but this rate rises to 64% for Greeks. In other words, the anxiety of the Greeks about the possibility of war is 4 times higher than the anxiety of the Turks in this regard.

Again, according to the same research, one out of every three Turks believes that the global public opinion will support Greece, not Turkey, in case of a crisis. The findings of our research show that 89% of Turks think that other countries will stand by Greece in a possible problem between the two countries.

The results of the research titled "What do Turks and Greeks believe" published by Ta Nea Newspaper support this finding. According to the findings of this research, 50 percent of the Turks think that the USA supports Greece, and 47 percent of the Greeks think that Washington is on the same side as Ankara (Milliyet, 2022)

According to the results of the research titled "What do Turks and Greeks believe", 32% of Greeks stated that they always heard negative things about Turks from their families when they were raised. In Turks, this rate is only 6.3% (Balkans.news, 2021). The finding of our study is in parallel with this research. In our research, 36% of Greeks stated that they listened to negative things about Turks in their childhood, and 7% of them said that they strongly did. The percentage of Turks who stated that they grew up listening to negative opinions about Greeks is 31%. On the other hand, 6% of the Turks stated that they had strongly heard bad things about the Greeks.

## **6. Conclusion**

According to the results of the research, Turks and Greeks think that most of the problems between them are caused by politics and that there is no problem between the societies. Turks are more likely than Greeks to believe that the two societies are friends. The belief that Turkey and Greece will be good friends in the future is high in both societies. These findings reveal the demand for peace and the desire of both peoples to resolve the problems on the agenda and for friendship and positive approaches to prevail in relations. This result is promising for the future of relations between the two countries. Therefore, the politicians in power in Turkey and Greece need to hear this demand of the people and develop policies and solutions that will solve the problems and create an environment for reconciliation.

One of the striking findings of the research is the fear of war between the two countries, especially in Greek society. Although relations have deteriorated from time to time and politicians' statements have become very harsh, Turks do not think that a war between the two countries is very likely. Concern about a possible war is almost four times higher than in Greek society. As such, the fear of war inevitably harms the societies' views of each other.

The research shows that there are fanatic groups within both societies who do not want Turkey-Greece relations to improve. While these radical elements are war-mongering in their countries, both societies are aware of this fact and are uneasy about this situation. This awareness of the people and their demand for peace shows that the influence of fanatics will decrease in the future.

The study revealed that both communities heard negative opinions about the people of the neighboring country from their parents during their childhood years. As a result of this, there is a mutual distrust in the social subconscious in both countries. Therefore, for a lasting Turkish-Greek friendship, negative opinions and prejudices in the social subconscious should be replaced by friendly feelings. In this context, especially the institutions that determine educational policies should act responsibly and sensitively. For example, for this purpose, revising the parts of the textbooks describing Turkish-Greek relations by removing nationalist propaganda and revising them with an objective and peaceful understanding will give the new generations a more objective and tolerant perspective.

Although Turkey and Greece seem like two hostile countries that constantly argue, the cooperation between the two peoples in difficult and painful times is also remarkable. In the historical process, both communities have set very good examples in terms of solidarity between neighboring peoples. Turks and Greeks who answered the research questions stated that they were ready to help their neighbors in case of a natural disaster. Both societies have already shown their determination many times before. It is seen that both communities have a positive approach to the marriage bond to be established between the two countries. The percentage of Turks and Greeks who do not object to the marriage of a relative of theirs to someone from another country is very high. Even though there are big problems between countries from time to time due to political issues, it is seen that the two communities have sympathy for each other in their hearts.

To explain with an example, Turkish and Greek peoples are like fingers and nails. It is very difficult or even impossible to separate them from each other. Or to use another metaphor, two societies are like lovers who lived together for many years but then separated. Even though the societies that have lived side by side for many years have separated their ways, they have always been a special sensitivity towards each other. Both societies follow the events in the other country through the media. Even the faintest spark of friendship is enough to ignite the fires of peace between the two communities. And Turkish-Greek peace is the common dream of both communities.

Realizing the expectation of peace felt on the social base and developing friendships should be the main mission of the governments of both countries. In this

regard, politicians need to take concrete steps rather than giving speeches. On the other hand, the dialogue and synergy to be established between the two countries will have a very important effect not only in terms of peace but also in terms of the interests of the two countries.

Do the two countries need to experience a new disaster just to realize that their people are actually good friends and to understand the importance of peace and brotherhood?

### **Conflict of Interest Statement**

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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