

Perceptions of Greece-Turkey Disaster Diplomacy: Europeanization and the Underdog Culture

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1. Introduction

Disasters have long affected humanity, but only recent decades have witnessed a scientific approach to understand their root causes. The focus has moved away from disasters as “acts of deities” or “acts of nature” to seeing how human choices, decisions and behavior create and maintain the vulnerabilities that become apparent after a disaster strikes. One of those influences is politics, not only in how political decisions create disasters but also in how disasters influence politics. Disaster diplomacy is one such topic that examines the potential for disaster-related actions to trigger political changes.

Gaillard *et al.* define “disaster diplomacy” as focusing on “how and why disaster-related activities do and do not yield diplomatic gains looking mainly at disaster-related activities affecting diplomacy rather than the reverse.”¹ One of the first analytical studies involving the term “disaster diplomacy” was Kelman and Koukis.² Many previous studies, however, covered similar elements. Clifford analyzed the post-disaster actions taken by the U.S. and Mexican authorities following the 1954 Rio Grande flood along the U.S.-Mexico border.³ Quarantelli and Dynes explored the presence or the absence of post-disaster community conflict after major disasters.⁴ Kelman⁵ summarizes much disaster diplomacy work.

A recent case study that has been explored from several angles is the 1999 earthquakes in Greece and Turkey. The media tended to claim that those

earthquakes led to Greek-Turkish cooperation and the end of their long-standing enmity. Yet most research studies conclude that the Greek-Turkish rapprochement was not the outcome of the 1999 earthquakes, but had already started before that. This article supplements that work by adopting the disaster diplomacy framework to examine perceptions of the post-earthquake evolution of Greece-Turkey ties, leading to two new elements that contribute to the Greece-Turkey disaster diplomacy literature.

First, for the political elite in both countries, the Europeanization process dating back to 1996 formed a foundation supporting the post-earthquake policy changes in Greece-Turkey bilateral relations. Second, at the grassroots level, the earthquakes acted as a catalyst for social change that overcame the perceptions of one side dominating and the other side being an underdog, a view that had bred mistrust on both sides. The change in negative perceptions and stereotypes of each side by the other, in parallel with the Europeanizing societal and discursive processes, formed a root cause of the rapprochement that was permitted to move forward due to the opening created by the earthquakes.

This article's next section provides an overview of disaster diplomacy literature, highlighting conceptual approaches developed for comparing disaster diplomacy case studies with some of the literature covering the Greece-Turkey case study. Using the latter as a basis, *Section 3* of this article details some of the historical background of Greek-Turkish relations, focusing on the construction of the negative perception of each other and reasons why previous reconciliation attempts (1979, 1987 and 1996) failed. *Section 4* of this article explains the methodology used here: semi-structured interviews in Greece and Turkey designed to overcome some of the limitations in previous disaster diplomacy work and to explore perceptions of Greece-Turkey disaster diplomacy. That leads to *Section 5*, which presents results and analysis from the interviews, highlighting three components of the Greece-Turkey reconciliation emerging from the interviews: overcoming stereotypes, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and a change of political and media culture. These results are then explored as part of pathways that either help or hinder disaster diplomacy, as identified in disaster diplomacy literature, forming *Section 6* of this article. This article's conclusions connect this case study with the existing theoretical patterns from the disaster diplomacy literature, summarizing how this analysis corroborates previous studies indicating that the earthquakes catalyzed and pushed along the rapprochement process, but did not create it.

2. Typologies of Disaster Diplomacy in the Balkans and Beyond

In more contemporary disaster diplomacy work, the focus has been on “disaster-related activities” influencing diplomatic activities. Disaster-related activities include pre-disaster actions such as mitigation, prevention and preparedness. Examples are creating, monitoring and enforcing building codes along with setting up and testing a warning system. Disaster-related activities also include post-disaster actions, such as providing emergency relief supplies and planning reconstruction.

Many specific case studies have been examined including Greece-Turkey based on the aftermath of the 1999 earthquakes.⁶ The U.S.A.-Cuba case study was based on cooperation to prevent weather-related disasters.⁷ India-Pakistan followed principally the earthquakes in 2001 and 2005.⁸ The attempts at peace processes around the Indian Ocean after the 26 December 2004 tsunamis have also been examined, with the focus tending to be on the failed reconciliation in Sri Lanka and the successful peace deal in Aceh that was based on ongoing pre-tsunami negotiations.⁹ The overall conclusion from the case studies is that disaster-related activities are unlikely to generate new diplomacy, but disaster-related activities sometimes catalyze cooperation in the short term. In the long term, non-disaster factors tend to influence diplomacy more than disaster-related activities, with the non-disaster factors determining the ultimate success or failure of any peace processes.

Theoretical patterns across disaster diplomacy case studies have also been explored. Comfort started such comparisons by suggesting the use of the Complex Adaptive Systems (CAS) theory in order to categorize disaster diplomacy case studies.¹⁰ She focuses on disasters opening a window of opportunity for collaboration amongst rivals that could lead to a successful policy change if the appropriate properties and mechanisms exist or are being developed. Kelman suggests different “typologies” for categorizing disaster diplomacy case studies.¹¹ The first typology is the propinquity or neighborliness of the parties involved. The second typology is the aid relationship among the disaster diplomacy parties. The third typology focuses on disaster diplomacy as a *multi-level process*, drawing on Diamond and McDonald’s multi-track diplomacy.¹² The fourth typology is the purpose, in that multiple reasons exist to pursue or avoid disaster diplomacy

outcomes. So far, none of the typologies has provided explanatory or predictive power for disaster diplomacy.

Two more forms of disaster diplomacy are useful.¹³ The first form is “tit for tat” disaster diplomacy. When one party aids another, that favor can be returned at a later stage. Conversely, if one party refuses to assist another, then that decision can haunt the first party when it needs aid. The second form is “mirror disaster diplomacy.” Some states such as Cuba try to remain self-sufficient in disaster risk reduction, partly in order to avoid needing international assistance from enemies such as the U.S.A. That is, the desire to avoid prospects of disaster diplomacy is a factor in promoting sound disaster-related measures.

3. Greece-Turkey Disaster Diplomacy

3.1. History of the Greece-Turkey Conflict and Rapprochement

Greece and Turkey have a long history of conflict. The contemporary incarnations of both countries obtained their national identities by fighting each other. Greece’s war of independence from 1821 to 1829 was fought against the Ottoman Empire, modern Turkey’s predecessor. From then until World War I, Greece was involved in conflicts that expanded its territories over areas of the Ottoman Empire until Greece reached its contemporary borders. Turkey’s post-World War I war of independence from 1919 to 1922 ended with Turkey’s victory over the Greek army. As a result, both countries’ national identity is constructed on the foundation of opposition towards the “other.”¹⁴

This perception of the “other” is constructed in textbooks, historiography and literary texts.¹⁵ Textbooks in both countries reproduce a Manichean dualism of the two countries’ modern history on the basis of “good” and “evil.”¹⁶ A major historical breakthrough such as territorial expansion in one country’s history is generally characterized as a negative consequence for the other: “Greeks seem to develop a historical consciousness where the ‘other’ is constantly brought to mind in order to justify the past and foster the present national identity.”¹⁷ Historiography tends to follow the same position as the textbooks, with detailed descriptions of the historical “facts” as perceived by the two countries following an egocentric nationalistic narrative that considers the “other” as an unreliable and dangerous neighbor that cannot be cooperated with.

This construction of “the other” formed a “national culture” which was based on introversion, xenophobia, siege mentality, and conspiracy theories.¹⁸

Especially in Greece, it has formed an “underdog national culture.”¹⁹ Ethnocentric and nationalistic behavior have emerged in aspects of foreign policy that are framed as issues of national importance: “*national culture* refers to and reflects the discourses developed within the various parts of society ... with regard to the country’s stance in international politics, the definition and promotion of national interests and the conduct of foreign policy.”²⁰ This underdog culture undermined previous rapprochement attempts between the two countries.

Much of this identity construction, however, occurred after World War II. Turkey and Greece were relatively peaceful during the approximate period from 1928 until 1955. In 1930, the Greek prime minister and the President and founder of the Turkish republic signed a Peace Treaty in Ankara that was a significant vehicle of this peaceful period. In 1950, both countries sent troops to Korea and, in 1952, they both joined NATO.

Tensions flared in 1955 and 1963 over Cyprus, especially between the Greek-Cypriot and the Turkish-Cypriot communities, leading to riots targeting the Greek Orthodox minority in Istanbul. On 16 March 1963, Prime Minister Inonu on behalf of the Turkish state abrogated the 1930 Peace Treaty. In fact, “the Cyprus issue had finally brought about the end of three decades of good relations between Athens and Ankara.”²¹ On 15 July 1974, the dictatorship in power in Greece overthrew the leader of Cyprus. Subsequently, Turkey intervened with a full-scale military operation to Cyprus which split the island in two. Again, the Cyprus issue undermined bilateral relations. The 1974 Cyprus crisis was succeeded by a Greek-Turkish dispute over the Aegean Sea’s continental shelf. These two events established in Greece a new security doctrine which treated Turkey as “the threat from the east.”²² They also established the perception of Greece as the underdog with respect to bilateral relations, so that “Turkey was viewed as an ‘existential threat’ to Greece’s survival.”²³

Reconciliation led by the Greek and Turkish prime ministers peaked in 1979-1980 when official and unofficial negotiations were conducted. Another Aegean crisis was avoided and communication channels were established to support rapprochement. The process failed due to the dominant underdog culture in Greece and the unwillingness of the Leader of the Opposition, Andreas Papandreou, to compromise.

In 1987, another Aegean Sea crisis nearly led to war between Turkey and Greece. In January 1988, Papandreou, who was then Prime Minister, met his Turkish counterpart in Davos, Switzerland, at the World Economic Forum. After

two days of discussions, they decided on a series of goodwill measures that initiated a brief period of rapprochement covering topics such as tourism, economic measures and culture along with higher-level military confidence-building measures. This “Davos spirit” evaporated soon after, with the rapprochement stalled by the underdog culture in Greece.²⁴ With regard to this failure, “dynamics from above often do not suffice alone to secure a historical breakthrough in policy approach.”²⁵ The domestic factor epitomized here by the “natural culture” pre-empted the rapprochement.²⁶

In late 1995 and early 1996, yet another crisis in the Aegean once again brought the two countries to the edge of a full-scale war. The reason was an incident over the control of two islets in the eastern Aegean named Imia/Kardak. This crisis, and its resolution, appears to have convinced many Greek decision-makers that a no-dialogue-with-Turkey culture was unproductive, so they should look further at engagement and cooperation. As the crisis was evolving, the governing party (the Pan-Hellenic Socialist Movement or “PASOK”) underwent a coincidental leadership change with the nomination of Kostas Simitis as Prime Minister. Simitis was leader of the “modernists’ faction” inside PASOK, with the main goal being the reform of domestic and foreign policy in order to integrate Greece into the EU system. As described by Economidis, “there was a systematic political as well as an ideological program for intended change and reform towards a parallel process of ‘Europeanizing’ Greek foreign policy while pursuing a modernizing domestic reform process.”²⁷

With the crisis earlier in the year resolved and Simitis pushing for reform within Greece, April 1996 witnessed a step-by-step approach with Greece-Turkey bilateral discussions on low-level topics. Those discussions were undermined by the 1997 Cyprus missile crisis, during which the Cypriot government attempted to purchase Russian air defense missiles, and the February 1999 arrest of Kurdish separatist leader Abdullah Öcalan after he left the Greek embassy in Kenya. The Öcalan crisis led to the replacement of Greece’s Minister for Foreign Affairs by George Papandreou, son of Andreas Papandreou. George Papandreou was a modernist, moderate politician and, being the son of Andreas, helped to keep the tensions low in PASOK’s patriotic faction. All these factors permitted continuing progress with Turkey.

In March 1999, the Kosovo crisis threatened to destabilize the Balkans. Greece was traditionally an ally of Serbia (Christian orthodox) while Turkey was traditionally an ally of Albania (Muslims). The waves of refugees from the military

action by Belgrade and then NATO was particularly concerning to both Greece and Turkey. On 4 April 1999, Papandreou and the Turkish foreign minister Ismail Cem had a phone conversation in order to coordinate humanitarian aid. Thus, the Kosovo crisis opened up a direct channel of communication between the two ministers, and “Kosovo had highlighted the degree to which Greece and Turkey had to confront a range of issues where their joint interests were far stronger than their respective differences.”²⁸

On 24 May 1999, Cem wrote a letter to Papandreou expressing the need to broaden their cooperation in other issues such as combating terrorism. One month later, Papandreou replied using a very friendly tone accepting the proposal and extending the agenda to other issues such as the economy, tourism, culture, the environment, organized crime and trade . In July 1999, the first round of discussions was organized in Ankara and Athens. The Greek decision-makers emphasized this “resolution culture” on the grounds that discussion over issues of mutual interest could lead to a win-win process. Their main goal was to end the “zero-sum game” culture that was long established in Greek foreign policy.

This action met strong criticism based on public perception of the Greek underdog culture. Some of the Greek media attempted to sabotage the action. Some authors suggest pessimism in expecting that the 1999 talks would have defused tension over the long-term in the absence of other factors.²⁹ But “other factors” came into play in the form of earthquakes.

3.2. The 1999 Earthquakes: The Disaster Diplomacy Tipping Point?

On 27 August 1999, Turkey was hit by an earthquake disaster, killing over 17,000 people. Turkey immediately asked Greece for assistance, which was provided.³⁰ Then, on 7 September, an earthquake disaster struck Athens, killing 143 people. Greece asked Turkey for aid, which was provided.³¹ Prominent amongst the mutual aid was the Greek search-and-rescue team EMAK, which pulled a Turkish boy from the rubble, triggering extensive media coverage across Greece and Turkey, including commentary favoring a new approach toward the “other.” Then, after the Athens earthquake, the Turkish search-and-rescue team AKUT, in its first mission outside Turkey, pulled a Greek boy from the rubble during a televised rescue operation. An outpouring of support for each other from Greek and Turkish citizens followed, putting pressure on the media and the governments to follow suit.

Considering Kelman's categorization of disaster diplomacy case studies, there is little doubt that propinquity played a significant role.³² The idea of Greece and Turkey as neighbors who should cooperate with each other played on the conscience of the populations and permitted rapid logistics.³³ The aid relationship started out as being donor-recipient, with Greece assisting Turkey, but then became mutual aid when Turkey helped Greece after the September earthquake. That also exemplified the "tit-for-tat" disaster diplomacy approach, reinforcing Greek-Turkish earthquake-related connections. The diplomacy was being pursued across multiple tracks, with the public and media involved as much as NGOs and the governments.

In the aftermath of the earthquakes, the two countries continued with second and third rounds of talks. The focus was on less contentious issues, such as culture, education, tourism, illegal immigration and organized crime. As results emerged from these talks, the Greek national underdog culture was being transformed and was more eager to accept the reconciliation process.³⁴

The public's legitimatization of the diplomacy enabled the Greek decision-makers to open the EU door to Turkey at the EU Summit at Helsinki in December 1999.³⁵ Greek decision-makers saw it³⁶

as a window of opportunity, which precisely could make Turkey's engagement with the European integration system conditional upon certain rules, procedures and deadlines ... Greece could make the resolution of its bilateral conflict with Turkey a prerequisite for Turkey's closer relations with the EU.

Effectively, Greece lifted its veto against Turkey's accession to EU and transferred its bilateral disputes with Turkey to the EU level. The post-Helsinki momentum led to significant collaboration between Greece and Turkey on higher-level topics including military confidence-building measures, disaster-related initiatives and pollution prevention along the border, along with the continuing work on economic, cultural, tourism and trade topics.³⁷ The 1999 earthquakes certainly influenced that diplomacy, but did the disasters create the reconciliation?

4. Methodology for This Study

The Greece-Turkey 1999 earthquakes case study has been analyzed from a disaster diplomacy perspective.³⁸ Others have explored the earthquakes' influence on Greece-Turkey rapprochement using other frameworks.³⁹ Some studies use this case study to develop and elaborate international relations theories.⁴⁰

Much of this work, though, does not cover perceptions of the disaster diplomacy components by those who were involved, either in the Greek-Turkish case study or in other case studies. The disaster diplomacy literature, in particular, can be weak in not involving field evidence from interviews.⁴¹ Nonetheless, some recent work does so.⁴² For the Greece-Turkey case study, an important question within the context of multi-track diplomacy is why Greek public opinion reacted positively to the elite's strategy of engaging Turkey.

The Greek-orientated perspective is important for two reasons. First, the diplomacy was instigated by the Greek side.⁴³ That does not neglect Turkey's important and essential role, but instead seeks to understand root causes of the shift from conflict to cooperation which appear to be based on the Greek side. Second, the literature explains that the major Greece-Turkey rapprochement attempts over the last decades were undermined by the existence of a Greek underdog culture in the media, economic interests and intelligentsia. Again, that does not deny reluctance from the Turkish side as well, but instead seeks to explain why the root cause of rapprochement failures appears to have been on the Greek side.

An important element emerging from trying to better understand the Greek influence has also been generally absent in the literature: the role of the Greek Orthodox minority in Istanbul. This minority is legally protected by the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne that set the boundaries of modern-day Greece and Turkey but has still suffered from discrimination and oppression.⁴⁴

The originality of this article is therefore in conducting interviews with players in Greece-Turkey disaster diplomacy, including the Greek minority in Istanbul, in order to determine their perceptions of disaster diplomacy's influence on Greek-Turkish rapprochement. That yields insights into how non-governmental diplomacy tracks could and could not influence disaster diplomacy processes, especially in terms of grassroots and then media views shifting so substantially that governmental diplomacy tracks have the opportunity to succeed.

Loosely structured, open-ended, one-on-one interviews were conducted due to the major advantages they have in comparison with other qualitative methods of research.⁴⁵ The main strength of this method is giving the researcher the opportunity to be more flexible during the conversation to permit interviewees to

pursue their own interests and own line of thoughts. Additionally, interviewees are more able to express their opinions and deeper insights, compared to other forms such as filling in quantitative questionnaires, and they are not inhibited by others' opinions, as can occur in focus groups. Limitations of semi-structured one-on-one interviews are that results cannot be generalized and that some interviewees might be inhibited by being alone with the interviewer.

During visits to Istanbul and Athens in June 2009, 18 interviews were conducted (*Table 1*). All the interviews were recorded and the duration of each exceeded one hour. The focus was trying to understand more about the view of Greece as an underdog and the shift in that which permitted the disaster diplomacy to move forward.

Table 1:
Interview Details

Interviewee #	Gender	Age Range	Status	Location
1	Male	20-29	Member of the Greek orthodox minority	Istanbul
2	Male	20-29	TURGRESOC (Turkish)	Istanbul
3	Female	50-59	local resident of Arnavutkoy (Turkish)	Istanbul
4	Female	50-59	WINPEACE activist and TURGRESOC founder (Turkish)	Istanbul
5	Female	50-59	Academic, Bilgi University, Journalist (Greek)	Istanbul
6	Male	60-69	Member of the Greek orthodox minority	Istanbul
7	Male	20-29	TURGRESOC (Turkish)	Istanbul
8	Male	40-49	Academic, Bilgi University (Greek)	Istanbul
9	Female	20-29	Member of the Greek orthodox minority	Istanbul
10	Male	60-69	Consul in Istanbul (Greek)	Istanbul
11	Male	50-59	Journalist (Greek)	Athens
12	Female	30-39	Papandreou's advisor (Greek)	Athens
13	Male	40-49	Papandreou's advisor, Academic (Greek)	Athens
14	Male	60-69	Academic, (Greek)	Athens

15	Male	40-49	Papandreou's advisor, Academic (Greek)	Athens
16	Male	40-49	TURGRESOC (Greek)	Athens
17	Male	20-29	TURGRESOC (Greek)	Athens
18	Female	20-29	TURGRESOC (Turkish)	Athens

The interviewees included diplomats, politicians, academics, a journalist, and members of NGOs covering three main clusters: people from the grassroots, those involved in the negotiating process and those from the Greek Orthodox minority in Istanbul.

The majority of policymakers who were interviewed were academics. The reason for this is that, especially in Greece, academics normally offer advice services to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in addition to their research and teaching activities. "Papandreou's advisors" refer to people advising George Papandreou, who was the Greek foreign minister at the time of the rapprochement with Turkey. In *Table 1*, "TURGRESOC" refers to the youth NGO "Turkish Greek Society." It organizes seminars and simulation games for undergraduate and postgraduate students of both countries to bring them together. The focus is to overcome the usual, hostile stereotypes that have dominated both sides of the Aegean for decades.

All the interviews started with ice-breaking questions about what the interviewees remembered and how they experienced the Istanbul and/or Athens earthquakes. Then, there were three different pre-constructed sets of questions depending on the interviewee: one for the members of the Greek Orthodox minority in Istanbul, one for the TURGRESOC members, and the last one for the rest of the interviewees (mostly academics). The members of the Greek Orthodox minority were asked if and how their everyday life changed after the earthquakes, especially concerning their treatment by the official Turkish state. The TURGRESOC members were asked how they experienced the rapprochement process through TURGRESOC's meetings. The rest of the interviewees were asked about their personal experiences.

The interviewee sample was selected using a "snowballing" technique. Initial interview appointments were set up with personal contacts who in turn suggested others to interview. Most of the interviews took place in public buildings such as at the Bosphorus, Galata Seray and Bilgi universities in Istanbul. In Athens,

the interviews were conducted at Panteion University and the University of Athens.

The main bias in this methodology is that the interviews in Greece were conducted in Greek by a native Greek speaker, this article's first author, whereas the interviews in Turkey were conducted in English, not the first language of either this paper's first author or the interviewees. As such, the interviewees in Greece seemed to express their opinions with more clarity than the interviewees in Turkey, but that was a result of the language.

The interviews were conducted and the material was reported in such a way as to protect anonymity and confidentiality, although the members of the NGOs interviewed gave permission to name their NGO. In fact, in signing the consent form, most interviewees did not request anonymity, but their anonymity is retained here. No sensitive information was collected during the interviews and each interviewee was given the opportunity to withdraw their data from the project at any time up until July 1, 2009, but no one did.

5. Results from This Study

5.1 Overcoming Stereotypes

The interviewees highlighted that the "earthquake diplomacy" was feasible in 1999, because it was the first major event to significantly challenge the long-lived stereotypes on both sides of the Aegean. Interviewee #18, a Turkish member of TURGRESOC, stated:

Before I joined TURGRESOC, I did not have any positive feelings about Greeks but after I joined I realized that in fact I did not know anything about the social relations of the two people and a great opportunity was given to me to research more. Of course in the end I changed my perception about Greece.

Interviewee #2, another Turkish member of TURGRESOC agreed, in stating "With the TURGRESOC meetings we discovered how close we were culturally and geographically." Interviewee #7, a Greek member of TURGRESOC, also agreed, but sounded a note of caution:

These initiatives help a lot in a way to free people's minds from negative stereotypes and prejudice. However I doubt if these initiatives actually change people's minds. You'd rather need long term policies at the state level to achieve that.

That perception matches what much of the literature suggests happened. The change in public opinion in both countries cemented the pre-earthquake rapprochement process and forced the politicians to achieve even more results.⁴⁶ Consequently, the change in public opinion was a crucial element in the success of the post-earthquake rapprochement in comparison with previous reconciliation attempts. Interviewee #4, a Turkish founder of TURGRESOC, summed up the attitude change based on her informal discussions with Turkish TURGRESOC members:

... they told me that at first they were very cautious about the Greeks but after the meetings they became friends. Also, they learned that they have to be more careful with their prejudices and more open minded and most importantly they learned that even as individuals they can actually provoke change to other people's minds because they changed themselves, their beliefs and attitude.

Of particular importance on the Greek side was overturning the national identity as the underdog. From the analysis provided hitherto, from the mid-1970s through to the 1990s, reconciliation attempts were undermined by the strong presence of an underdog national culture, especially in Greece. The 1999 earthquakes changed the attitude of the Greek public concerning their dominant dogma of characterizing Turkey as the threat from the east. Yet the 1999 earthquakes established the change that had already started in the aftermath of the 1996 Imia/Kardak crisis in some segments of Greek society.

Heraclides notes that the rapprochement process was a combination of "enlightened civil society ... decisive role of the two foreign ministers ... and the unexpected earthquakes."⁴⁷ Interviewee #13 adds one more argument:

With no doubt the earthquakes contributed to the collapse of the dominant Greek national culture. However the European Union was the catalyst for the rapprochement. After the 1996 crisis, the Greek agentic

culture (key policy makers) has realized that if Greece promoted the Europeanization process of Turkey that would enhance the bilateral relations. Therefore the major contribution of the earthquakes was the fact that transformed the supporters of the Europeanization strategy from minority to majority in Greece.

Interviewee #8 shares the same opinion:

The rapprochement did not start with the earthquakes. However it was the “golden opportunity” for the political elites of both countries to introduce predetermined policies in their domestic constituencies.

Interviewee #14, a member of the Greek Orthodox minority in Istanbul who now lives in Greece, summarized how the national underdog culture in Greece was overturned following the earthquakes and the influence on the diplomacy:

It was the first time that Greeks met ordinary Turks and vice versa and not stereotypes constructed by the media and the school textbooks ... It was the first time that both peoples actually had good intentions and on that basis the political elites had a unique chance to promote cooperation.

The perception here again matches the literature in that the change in grassroots attitudes permitted the decision-makers to pursue the pathway to peace.

5.2. *Non-Governmental Organizations*

Previous work suggests that part of that pathway to peace was also the diplomacy track involving non-state organizations. Tsakonas argues that the “earthquake diplomacy” allowed a plethora of non-state actors — particularly NGOs, media and academia — to influence the government-level decision-making, especially the shaping of Greek foreign policy.⁴⁸ Heraclides has noted that in the aftermath of the 1996 Imia/Kardak crisis, grassroots movements emerged which were calling for the need for rapprochement, but their voices were soon silenced due to the strong presence of the underdog national culture and the absence of social interactions and a stable political climate.⁴⁹ Ganapati *et al.* highlight the importance of NGOs in

maintaining Greek-Turkish disaster-related cooperation irrespective of governmental attitudes.⁵⁰

The quotations above from TURGRESOC further support this view, as does the process that led to this NGO's founding. After the 1996 Imia/Kardak crisis, one Greek woman and one Turkish woman decided to initiate a joint grassroots feminist movement named the Women's Initiative for Peace (WINPEACE). The Greek woman was Margaret Papandreou, a leading Greek activist on feminist issues and the mother of George Papandreou. The Turkish woman was Zeynep Oral, a Turkish journalist, feminist and supporter of Greek-Turkish friendship since the early 1980s.

WINPEACE organized its first seminar in May 1998, jointly between Kos, Greece, and Bodrum, Turkey, which are separated by just a few kilometers of the Aegean. The second seminar was held in Athens in November 1998. That matches the arguments that there were grassroots movements eager for rapprochement right before the 1999 earthquakes.⁵¹ Yet in discussions at the 1998 seminars, some members expressed skepticism concerning the organization's aims and ability to make connections. The 1999 earthquakes melted the ice between even the most hesitant Greek and Turkish participants, demonstrating the catalyzing role of the disasters. Based on that success, WINPEACE decided to develop meetings for youth: "we decided to target our projects and funding to those that are supposed to become the future leaders" (Interviewee #4).

In 2000, two student seminars were organized under the umbrella of WINPEACE in Istanbul, Turkey, and in Thessaloniki, Greece. According to Interviewee #4, "Our methodology was to work on mutual problems; environment and gender issues." The third meeting was organized in August 2003 at Ankara's Middle East Technical University, the aim of which was to explore the potential of developing a common civil society in Cyprus. The participants analyzed and critically compared the contents of history books in secondary schools from Greece, Turkey and the two parts of Cyprus, examining stereotypes, identities and historiographies.

Financial support for these meetings was not always easy to find. For the third meeting, Turkish co-organizers approached George Papandreou in a meeting in Istanbul and asked him to provide funds for the Greek delegation's air tickets. Interviewee #2 noted that, "He was very willing to help us and seemed to support our cause." Today, TURGRESOC meetings continue with financial and organizational assistance from both the state and the private sector.

The 1999 earthquake disasters provided the impetus for WINPEACE (afterward including TURGRESOC) to continue their work, in effect representing a catalyst. But the disasters did not create the group, since it was founded in 1998. Today, the earthquakes are rarely part of the discussion. Interview #4 believes that, “We planted the seeds of positive reconciliation techniques,” and Interviewee #18 notes that TURGRESOC is a “unique chance to overcome past and current biases and build a small but still important bridge between two countries/cultures.” While the earthquakes are part of creating this mechanism, they are no longer a major factor driving interest in and the work of TURGRESOC.

The Greek Orthodox minority in Istanbul represents another non-governmental group whose work and status were catalyzed by the earthquakes. This minority comprises approximately 2,000 people in a city of over fourteen million people. The interviews with members of the Greek Orthodox minority revealed a generational disparity in attitudes to the Greece-Turkey reconciliation. The older generation is somewhat reluctant to accept the new situation due to their strong memories from the 1950s and 1960s when the minority was bigger in number and more prosperous. The younger generation has most embraced and most benefited from the rapprochement.

The employment opportunities created have been of significant interest. Interviewee #1 explained that the disasters:

Without any doubt helped a lot at the financial sector and merchandise. After 1999, the number of Greeks seeking investments in Turkey rose significantly. Therefore, there was a need for translators that could speak Greek and Turkish. This is how I got engaged with the business, and after 2002, I represent Greeks in the Turkish market that are interested in investing or importing goods from Turkey or even exporting goods to Turkey.

The younger members of the Greek Orthodox minority in Istanbul present two advantages for businesses. First, they are bilingual in Greek and Turkish. Second, they were born and raised in Turkey and so they are familiar with the country’s customs and moral values, which means that they are more easily trusted by the Turks. Meanwhile, they also have connections to their Greek cultural roots regarding customs on that side, so they can be more trusted by the Greeks. Many minority members started as translators in business meetings, but since then, have

earned enough trust from both sides that they were eventually positioned as managers of newly established joint Greek-Turkish ventures.

Another example is the case of Arnavutköy, a community in Istanbul located on the shore of the European side of the Bosphorus. In 1998, Istanbul had decided to construct a third bridge across the Bosphorus that would come from Arnavutköy on the European side. Parts of Arnavutköy would be destroyed by the bridge construction and the traffic would completely change the remaining community, so the locals launched an anti-bridge campaign through an initiative called Arnavutköy District Initiative (ASG).

In order to build a comprehensive anti-bridge strategy, ASG promoted the environmental and cultural significance of its area.⁵² The group turned their interest to the old buildings that used to belong to the Greek minority who left during the 1960s but which are now abandoned despite their unique architecture. As the locals investigated the history of these houses, they contacted the former owners or their descendants. A bus trip was organized from Greece in 2002. Since then, every year Greeks have been visiting Arnavutköy and, based on the past, have succeeded in building a new-found relationship with the present residents of Arnavutköy. ASG not only contributed to the cancellation of the plans for the third bridge, but it also has forged connections between the Greek Orthodox minority in Istanbul and previous members now living in Greece. The perception of some within that community is that they had a strong influence on Greek-Turkish rapprochement. Interviewee #9 suggested:

I think that there is a new role for the Greeks that have settled down in Istanbul the last few years. If the Greek Orthodox minority of Istanbul was the “victim” of Greek-Turkish bilateral relations all these years after 1955, now we are the “seeds” of the post-1999 rapprochement process that started after the earthquakes.

The perception is that the Greek minority in Turkey were an important pre-existing basis on which Greece-Turkey disaster diplomacy could build.

5.3. A Change of Political and Media Culture

In addition to the bottom-up changes explained in the previous two sections, the reconciliation process had top-down elements. Keridis, for instance, argues that

“the old realist paradigm, state centric and antagonistic was replaced by a new liberal paradigm focusing on engagement and cooperation.”⁵³ That included government support for NGOs, encouraging the work that was being done among the grassroots.

From the Greek side, this process was encouraged by the leadership of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Two special agencies were established to assist this work, the General Directorate for International Development and Cooperation and the Committee on NGOs. Greek NGOs were supported in engaging with their Turkish counterparts. Thus, the Greek government institutionalized the role of NGOs “by providing the more internationally-orientated social actors with an operational framework in which to promote their goals.”⁵⁴ Tsakonas suggests that the Greek side encouraged this civil society expansion for two reasons:⁵⁵ First, to cement the rapprochement process by creating deep roots in the two societies; and second, to transfer European norms and procedures into Turkey’s domestic arena.

Similar observations were seen in how Turkey treated NGOs after the earthquakes. In the short term, the state attempted to control their activities, but in the long term, it changed its behavior as part of the Europeanization process.⁵⁶ In fact, the post-earthquake period in Turkey was marked by the rapid rise of the pro-EU Justice and Development Party (the “AK Party”). The party was founded in 2001 by a suite of powerful politicians and overwhelmingly won national elections in 2002, implementing a Europeanization agenda which included a 2004 law instituting liberal reforms to support NGOs.⁵⁷ The party’s formation and success were linked to the electorate’s disillusionment with the old political order, including but not limited to earthquake factors, with corruption – earthquake-related and non-earthquake related – being prominent.⁵⁸

Corruption in disaster response and relief, from siphoning off emergency supplies to price gouging in the disaster-affected area, is not inevitable, but it occurs frequently. Nonetheless, after the 1999 earthquake in Turkey, corruption was extensively highlighted as a pre-disaster (rather than post-disaster) phenomenon, leading to the high death toll because construction and zoning have long been corrupt processes.⁵⁹ Even when survivors were interviewed and media articles analyzed, despite mention of corruption in reconstruction contracts and new houses for survivors, the corruption emphasized for post-earthquake actions was related to covering up the evidence of buildings that collapsed due to pre-earthquake construction industry corruption.⁶⁰

Similarly, the interviewees in this study did not mention corruption in disaster relief, in either Greece or Turkey, as being relevant to the reconciliation. Nor did the interviewees emphasize the AK Party. Instead, their perception was that the earthquake opened up a political gap due to the inability of the state to provide post-disaster recovery, with consequences that were linked to pre-earthquake trends. In particular, they focused on Europeanization and NGO activity as the phenomena of interest.

Within those topics, NGO intervention created a tipping point of bottom-up policy change that Turkey tried to control in the short term. But for the interviewees, Turkey – as a country, rather than naming a specific political party – soon accepted the fact that NGOs needed to have more freedom to operate independently as part of complying with European norms and procedures: “Turkey’s EU membership candidacy has empowered the domestic actors in favor of Greek-Turkish cooperation and allowed them to use the EU to legitimize cooperative policies and activities.”⁶¹

As discussed earlier, Europeanization was also important for Greece in terms of the societal and discursive Europeanization of Greek domestic politics by the modernists’ faction within the ruling party that started in 1996.⁶² In parallel, in 2000, the EU funded a five-year program for strengthening Turkish NGOs.⁶³ As part of this program, a project named “Civic Dialogue” was established in order to fund initiatives from both countries at the NGO level. Major funding for Turkey’s civil society started in the aftermath of the Helsinki Summit in December 1999. Prior to that, more limited funding was available from the MEDA I projects, contributing to the start of Europeanization.⁶⁴

The interviewees’ perceptions corroborated the influence of Europeanization. Interviewee #9 noted:

There is a positive change enhanced by the Europeanization process of Turkey. For instance, this summer we organized a concert inside the historical place of Topkapi with Greek songs that was funded by the Turkish state and most of the audience was Turks. Something rather impossible before 1999.

The combination of top-down and bottom-up approaches is illustrated. Without the people wanting that cooperation and without the state funding, the event could not have happened, illustrating the people’s track of diplomacy.

To place these views into the wider contexts previously described, the societal and discursive Europeanization of Greek domestic policies occurred since 1996 in the aftermath of the Imia/Kardak crisis. In a parallel fashion, Turkey was developing a long-term strategic goal (since the mid-1980s) of accessing the EU.⁶⁵ These endeavors, based on Europeanization, had already prepared the ground for successful rapprochement efforts and were leading to fruitful results, such as Greek-Turkish cooperation over the Kosovo conflict.

The earthquake disasters offered the missing links between the government and the people. People-led activities blossomed when they saw their “enemy” suffering. That led to and was bolstered by positive comments from the media. After each earthquake, much of the media in both countries began to challenge the dominant discourse and avoided sensationalist opinions supporting the notion of “enemies.”⁶⁶ In particular, “the earthquake was the ‘irritation’ or the ‘stimulus’ that triggered fast-moving communications processes in a multitude of social and psychic systems in Greece and Turkey.”⁶⁷ That affected perceptions and views of the “other,” with far more positive coverage than in the previous generation.

One statistical survey of the media coverage of positive and negative stories in the Greek and Turkish press, notes that before the earthquakes, stories about each other were almost 60% negative.⁶⁸ After the earthquakes, they observed a reversal with more positive stories in both countries. This wave of mutual sympathy seems to have indicated a radical change in that the new stance of the media increased communication between both countries’ populations and created a baseline for the segments of society that were willing to trust each other and to collaborate more closely.⁶⁹ Before the Turkish earthquake, it was difficult to imagine that the most popular Greek newspaper could headline an article “We are all Turks” or that a Turkish newspaper could publish a front-page article entitled “Neighbor, We Could Not Have Known You Are Like That.”⁷⁰

Following the post-earthquake shift in media discourse, the countries’ leaders were given space to expand cooperation. To a large extent, they were pushed forward at a pace faster than they would have liked, which had the potential for derailing the entire rapprochement process.⁷¹

The latter point links to the “butterfly effect” described by Vathakou.⁷² Without the top-down and bottom-up connecting in their mutual desire for cooperation, the disaster diplomacy might have been recorded as a short-term friendship “spark” that, in the end, failed to bring the two countries together. More directly, after a major disaster, an “altruistic community” often emerges seeking

cooperation, but in the medium term, that can be replaced by a “corrosive community” as pre-existing rivalries reappear when opponents of collaboration regroup.⁷³

In the Greek-Turkish case study, this did not happen after the earthquakes, yet it had happened in previous reconciliation attempts. The interviewees perceived Europeanization in both countries to be a major difference after the 1999 earthquakes, especially with the political élites of both countries seeking to promote the rapprochement as part of Europeanization.

6. Discussion: Disaster Diplomacy Pathways

The results presented here contribute to deepening the understanding of Greek-Turkey disaster diplomacy through analyzing it according to existing theoretical patterns. Kelman’s pathways for promoting or inhibiting disaster diplomacy are used here.⁷⁴ The pathways that promote disaster diplomacy are:

- (i) Avoiding forcing of the process, because disaster diplomacy cannot be done too quickly or too slowly.
- (ii) Focusing on disaster-related activities rather than diplomacy, which assists in creating a basis for cooperation.
- (iii) Using informal networks, which help to increase communication linkages.
- (iv) Using multiple levels because disaster diplomacy tends to be more successful if it is implemented on more than one level.
- (v) Using a multi-way process in that a variety of links among different actors should be developed to support disaster diplomacy.
- (vi) Using science, because scientific and technical exchanges create mutual benefits and provide a foundation for disaster diplomacy.
- (vii) Being aware of the power of symbolism in that disaster-related activities, such as offering or rejecting aid, will be used to make diplomatic points.

The pathways that inhibit disaster diplomacy are:⁷⁵

- (1) Avoiding diplomacy, such as when a party refuses to contribute to disaster-related activities in a case that be seen as a diplomatic advance.
- (2) Relying on a disaster for diplomacy, which can give the diplomacy a tenuous basis.
- (3) Using disasters as weapons, such as blowing up dams on an enemy's territory.
- (4) Reacting to events that overwhelm or supersede disasters, such as leadership change.
- (5) Putting disaster diplomacy activities under a spotlight and raising expectations of success.
- (6) Pursuing vindictiveness, such as offering aid to an enemy to highlight its weaknesses and the lack of ability for self-help.

These pathways have been shown to be useful and robust in analysing case studies.⁷⁶ Thus, they are used to analyze the case study here.

The interviews suggested that most of the supporting pathways for disaster diplomacy were evident. Avoiding forcing of the process was present in that many of the elites waited for the wholesale change in the media and political culture (*Section 5.3*) before fully embracing the earthquakes' influence on the diplomacy.⁷⁷ No assumption was made by the decision-makers that the disasters would support the ongoing rapprochement. Instead, they were somewhat reactionary to public opinion and were often criticized as not being bold enough to grasp the post-earthquake opportunity and force the process along. That also contributed to keeping the focus on disaster, rather than diplomacy, in the initial aftermath of each earthquake, thereby permitting the images of Turkey, in particular, suffering to be played out and to overcome Greece's national underdog culture.

The NGOs involved (*Section 5.2*) illustrate how informal networks, multiple levels and a multi-way process all supported the disaster diplomacy results. Decision-makers were involved but did not proceed alone. Instead, multiple connections and mutual support helped to create a wide, encompassing process involving multiple, connected actors with similar goals.⁷⁸ That further assisted in legitimizing the formal processes, such as continued Europeanization. Science was not a significant part of these activities; however, technical help was evident in the exchanges of rescue teams between Greece and Turkey and in the continued disaster-related operational work.⁷⁹

All these pathways promoted symbolism. The mutual post-earthquake aid was a powerful image that Greece and Turkey can and should cooperate more closely, especially because Greece did not necessarily perceive itself to be the underdog any more. The symbolism of Greece providing aid was seen as overcoming the negative stereotypes (see *Section 5.1*). Symbolism appeared in other ways too. A photo showing Cem and Papandreou dancing the *zeimpekiko* (a Greek-Turkish folk dance) together a few months after the earthquakes was meant to symbolize friendship. It was also used as a symbol to inhibit Greek-Turkish amity by representatives of both countries' underdog culture, who interpreted it as a sign of weakness.

The dancing, though, is not disaster-related and few other disaster-diplomacy-inhibiting pathways were present. Neither Greece nor Turkey tried to avoid diplomacy by avoiding disaster-related activities. Instead, Greece was the first country to offer Turkey help and vice versa, thereby accepting possible diplomatic consequences through changing the political culture (*Section 5.3*). Greece-Turkey disaster diplomacy did not depend on the disasters, due to the long-standing attempts to overcome enmity, such as through the basis of Europeanization.

The earthquakes were not used by either side as weapons of war nor to gain military strategic advantage. The interviews also indicated that vindictiveness in offering mutual assistance was neither pursued nor interpreted, apart from some extremists. That is, the disaster-related activities and the subsequent connections that emerged were seen to be legitimate assistance on an equal basis and were seen to be legitimate rapprochement rather than seeking to exploit the enemy's weaknesses (*Sections 5.1* and *5.2*).

The remaining two inhibiting pathways for disaster diplomacy did appear. Events that overwhelm or supersede the earthquake disasters at times eclipsed disaster diplomacy. *Section 5.2* described the collaboration related to Istanbul's third bridge that forged Greek-Turkish ties. The *zeimpekiko* photo was described above. WINPEACE and TURGRESOC had strong impetus from the earthquakes, but were not founded because of them and continued for many reasons other than the earthquakes. Finally, for completeness to cover all the pathways turning the spotlight on the behind-the-scenes Greek-Turkish negotiations inhibited them, and had the potential for derailing the process, but the interviewees here did not mention that aspect.⁸⁰

Tit-for-tat disaster diplomacy was a key element in Turkey's response to Greece's earthquake. Some authors downplay the second earthquake, focusing on the changes induced by the disaster in Turkey.⁸¹ But the interviewees here clearly saw the situation as being a mutual exchange. Greece was permitted to accept aid from Turkey because Greece had already aided Turkey, so Greece was no longer in an underdog position. The mutual aid reinforced change in the political and media culture, serving as poignant symbolism of collaboration, rather than being images of one-way assistance. Mirror disaster diplomacy was not evident.

7. Conclusions

The evidence presented here indicates that the 1999 earthquake disasters did not generate new diplomacy, but rather catalyzed the existing process. The impact of the disasters on the rapprochement process was influential enough to ensure the success of Greek-Turkish reconciliation, especially given the non-disaster foundation for, and non-disaster reasons for continuing, the process. This conclusion corroborates previous analyses of Greek-Turkish rapprochement from a disaster diplomacy perspective that the earthquakes catalyzed and pushed along the rapprochement process, but did not create it.⁸² Other literature on the earthquakes' influence on the diplomacy supports that conclusion as well.⁸³

From the evidence presented here, the impact was bigger for the sub-state actors rather than for the formal, official diplomatic channels, showing the importance of multi-track diplomacy as part of disaster diplomacy analyses. For the political elite, the earthquakes were the "golden opportunity" for which they were waiting to legitimize their preferred and ongoing rapprochement policy. But at the non-governmental level, especially for the grassroots, it overturned the perceptions concerning the "other." As stated by Ker-Lindsay, "the lasting legacy of the earthquakes is that they allowed the people of the two countries to escape from the language and stereotypes of the past and develop a new way of looking at one another."⁸⁴

In 1996, the Imia/Kardak crisis shifted the Greek government away from confrontation with Turkey while Europeanization was affecting both countries. But the underdog culture was still difficult to overcome. Then, at the grassroots level — and also at the media level⁸⁵ — the earthquakes acted as a catalyst for social change, overcoming these underdog perceptions, with each side seeing the other in a new light. These two factors formed the root cause of the rapprochement that was

permitted to move forward due to the opening created by the earthquakes, confirming that the earthquakes did not create the diplomacy.

This study has better embedded the root of the collaboration in the histories of Greece and Turkey. It has done that by identifying Europeanization and overcoming the underdog culture as key factors in preventing a recurrence of the tension that had marked previous Greece-Turkey reconciliation attempts. That could occur after the earthquake disasters created the space for these collaborations to succeed.

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