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Greek Diplomacy and
the Hunt for Abdullah Ocalan

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PART A

THE BACKGROUND: GREECE, TURKEY AND ABDULLAH OCALAN

Introduction

During the third week of February 1999, relations between Greece and Turkey were plunged into crisis. The cause of this dispute was a failed Greek effort to protect accused Kurdish terrorist leader Abdullah Ocalan. The Ocalan affair was only the latest in a string of incidents that have severely strained Greek-Turkish relations. Nevertheless, this controversy soon consumed global attention as Kurdish protests and riots spread across Europe.

The roots of this crisis began with the fate of one man. Abdullah Ocalan is one of those rare individuals capable of independent action on the global stage. Some have labeled him a terrorist; others see him as a national liberationist. For decades he led a ruthless campaign for Kurdish self-determination. He presided over the Kurdish Workers Party (PKK), a radical Marxist group that was controversial even within Kurdish circles. His tactics were brutal and earned him the deep hatred of most of the Turkish population. By the late 1990s he had become Turkey's public enemy number one.

The apprehension of Ocalan evolved into an international incident. In 1998 it had first created a crisis in Mideastern politics and then discord within the European Union. The sharpest dynamic, however, was between Turkey and its rival Greece. The Ocalan affair had the potential to cause a new crisis, one that could even lead to a recurring nightmare of NATO military and political leaders: an actual armed confrontation between Greece and Turkey.

In both countries, diplomats and decision-makers had to strike a balance between their international objectives and powerful domestic pressure. In Greece, sympathy with the Kurds ran high, while in Turkey, public rage against Ocalan had reached the boiling point. These internal issues would severely constrain the leadership in both countries.

This crisis in Greek-Turkish relations was not preordained, but rather the bulk of the blame fell on the Greek government. Greece failed to chart a stable, coherent course for its foreign policy. In the end, several major Greek decision-makers lost their positions in the ensuing controversy. Greece had found itself cornered into a difficult position, but nonetheless failed to adequately manage a complex situation.

The Background: Greece-Turkey Relations in the 1990s

The relationship between Greece and Turkey was rocky long before Abdullah Ocalan became an issue. The two states have long been regarded as regional rivals with competing interests. Analysts, politicians and citizens in both countries maintain that the rivalry is ancient. They point to the centuries of oppression and conflict between Turkish and Greek populations in the region. The Greeks in particular make reference to their long struggle to overthrow Ottoman rule in the early nineteenth century.

This antagonism does have historic roots. Nevertheless, the most proximate causes of recent Greek-Turkish conflict only date back decades, not centuries. Instead of ancient grudges, the recent disputes deal simply with land, power and access to resources. Two major conflicts have strained Greek-Turkish relations this decade. They concern the unresolved problem on Cyprus and certain territorial claims in the Aegean.

Cyprus has soured Greek-Turkish relations since becoming independence in 1960. Violence between the Greek majority and the Turkish minority led to the imposition of a United Nations peacekeeping force in 1964. When a Greek-sponsored coup in 1974 threatened to destabilize the island's ethno-political balance, Turkey invaded. Turkish forces currently occupy approximately one third of the island. For decades, Greece has sought to reunify the island under a negotiated solution. Turkey has rejected this out of the fear that the Greeks would use their numerical superiority to oppress the Turkish Cypriot minority. When the Ocalan crisis began in February 1999, Greece and Turkey were still reeling from a controversy over a new Greek Cypriot air defense system that Turkey found unacceptable. Although a compromise was struck in December 1998 (the system was moved from Cyprus to the Greek island of Crete), tensions were still acute.

The second major conflict between Greece and Turkey revolves around disputed territorial claims in the Aegean Sea. The Turks and Greeks have competing claims on the continental shelf region, a dispute that involves the control of certain natural resources. The Turks have also challenged Greek territorial claims to water and airspace rights around certain small islets in the Aegean. Some of the most aggressive Greek claims would make virtually all of the Aegean a "Greek lake," a situation that Turkey finds threatening. Several major incidents over territorial sovereignty have threatened to spiral into a military confrontation. Repeated efforts at negotiation and third-party mediation have had no success.

In addition to these two major conflicts lies an emotional between Greece and Turkey. Greece is convinced that Turkey is the major threat to its security. Greece's defense expenditures (the highest per capita among NATO's European states) are mainly in response to fears of Turkey. Turkey, the greater military power, feels less threatened by Greece. Nevertheless, most Turks are convinced that Greece is determined to undermine Turkish unity and fight against every interest of the Turkish state. Greece's opposition to Turkish EU membership has reinforced this perspective.

The differences between Greece and Turkey are real and substantial. There are legitimate reasons for each side to be in conflict with the other. For example, the territorial demarcations have historically been quite vague and each side has much to gain and lose from the eventual outcome. However, there is clearly a psychological barrier to closer Greek-Turkish relations. Both states have often ignored benefits in order to simply spite the other. Turkish membership in the European Union would have significant economic benefits for Greece, but the anti-Turkish inertia of Greek foreign policy long maintained its position against EU membership for Turkey.

Abdullah Ocalan and the PKK

Abdullah Ocalan has inspired both intense scorn and religious devotion. For decades he combined the struggle for Kurdish liberation with his own Marxist-Leninist worldview. His tactics have been sufficiently brutal to earn him the hatred of most Turks.

Ocalan was born in 1948 in southeastern Turkey, close to the Syrian border. He studied political science in Ankara and there founded a Maoist group in 1973. In 1978 he founded the Kurdish Workers' Party (PKK), an extreme left-wing organization devoted to establishing an independent, socialist state for the Kurds.

The Kurds are an ethnically distinct population of 20 to 25 million people scattered mainly among Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Syria. In Turkey, they comprise majority populations in many of Turkey's Southeastern provinces. The Kurds have had to confront various forms of legal discrimination. Although being the largest ethnic group (10-12 million) in Turkey's population of 63 million, the Kurds are not a legally recognized minority. Consequently, Turkey forbids the use of the Kurdish language in media broadcasting, politics or education (it was only in 1991 that the unofficial use of Kurdish was legalized). Turkish military action against Kurdish liberationists has been particularly harsh. Human rights groups have accused Turkey of using torture, extra-judicial killings and restrictions on civil liberties to wage its struggle against Kurdish organizations. Around 30,000 people have died in this war.

Since 1984, the PKK has led a well-coordinated guerrilla war on behalf of the Kurdish people. Their numbers are reputed to be close to 10,000, although during the 1990s they lost ground to the efficient Turkish military. The PKK's operations also include a political organization, a propaganda dissemination wing and a self-styled "Kurdistan Parliament." The war had been led mainly from Syria, where Ocalan fled in 1980.

For many years the Syrian government was willing to permit Ocalan to operate from its territory. This changed in October 1998. Buckling under pressure and threats from Turkey, Syria decided that Ocalan was no longer worth the trouble. Thus began the ill-fated journey of Abdullah Ocalan. For the next six months, he would wander the globe seeking any country that would grant him asylum.

Ocalan's European Journey

The first stop on Ocalan's journey was Russia. He spent a portion of October and November 1998 in Moscow, trying to convince authorities to grant him asylum. Ocalan was soon spotted by agents from Israel, Turkey's regional ally. Tipped off by the Israelis, the United States and Turkey pressured Russia to deny his request. Russia was also unwilling to risk trade ties with Turkey or to needlessly jeopardize relations with Turkey. Turkish diplomats made both public and private warnings to the Russians against accepting Ocalan.

From Moscow, Ocalan fled to Italy. He was prepared to make a risky, high-profile gamble with the Italians. He was immediately arrested in Rome and his case assumed a high international profile. Italy refused to extradite Ocalan to Turkey, using the excuse that its constitution forbids extradition to a country that still has the death penalty (although true, it is likely that Italian authorities could have circumnavigated this provision if there were sufficient reason). This created a major diplomatic row between the two states.

Anti-Italian sentiment ran high in Turkey. The government of Turkey was prepared to use a wide range of tools to coerce Italy into extraditing Ocalan. The Defense Minister threatened to exclude Italian firms from Turkish defense contracts. Another minister threatened to end the transmission in Turkey of Italian state television stations.¹ Certain economic boycott options were discussed, even though it could spark a trade war with the entire European Union.

In the end, however, Turkey was unable to exert much influence over Italian policy. In its diplomacy with both Italy and previously with Russia, Turkey found that it simply was unable to coerce either state into capturing and extraditing Ocalan. Although the Ocalan issue was of primary national concern in Turkey, the issue was of far less importance to the other states.

Italy finally expelled Ocalan without a trial. Although his destination was unknown at the time, Ocalan returned to Russia and tried again to convince Moscow to accept him. In late January his request was denied for a second time.

After leaving Moscow, Ocalan made a major decision. With the aid of ultra-nationalist members of the Greek parliament, Ocalan was brought through VIP channels to Greece. Ocalan eventually found his way to the Greek island of Corfu. He arrived on a Lear jet provided by retired Greek Admiral Antonis Naxakis, one of Ocalan's closest friends. It is unknown how much knowledge Greek government officials had of Ocalan's arrival, although there was certainly some complicity in arranging his passage to Corfu.

The Greek government was now in an extremely delicate situation. Many of the top decision-makers were notified that Ocalan was now present on Greek soil. They would have to make serious decisions about what to do with this international outlaw. The

stakes were high. Greek leaders knew that they were risking a major diplomatic miscalculation.

PART B

DECISIONS: GREEK DIPLOMACY AND THE HARBORING OF ABDULLAH OCALAN

The Turkish Perspective: A Domestic Imperative

While Greece was agonizing over options, Turkey was solidly unified behind one goal: apprehending the terrorist Abdullah Ocalan. As of late January, Turkey was not yet aware of Ocalan's presence in Greece. However, all its security agents were on a global manhunt to find Ocalan. Although not explicitly confirmed, it is almost certain that they were helped by United States and Israeli intelligence agencies. Both the U.S. and Israel have key strategic relationships with Turkey. Both these states were highly motivated to aid Turkey.

The key decision-makers in Turkey were Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit and President Suleyman Demirel. Supporting actors included the very powerful Turkish General Staff (the military) and Turkey's intelligence organization, MIT. The Ecevit government had strong nationalist credentials. Ecevit was the same man who had ordered the invasion of Cyprus twenty-five years earlier. With national elections coming up in a few months, Ecevit needed to be perceived as aggressively pursuing Ocalan.

For Turkey, the apprehension of Ocalan fulfilled two major political imperatives. First, it was a major part of Turkey's ongoing war against Kurdish separatism. Since the days of Ataturk, Turkey has always had a strong dedication to the secular unity of the Turkish state. Violence in the Kurdish provinces was perceived as the most serious threat to that unity. Apprehending Ocalan would send a strong signal to Kurdish terrorist organizations.

Second, Ecevit and Demirel were under strong domestic pressure by the victims of Kurdish terrorism. Ocalan's bloody tactics had inspired widespread hatred among the Turkish populace. Street protests often included the mothers of soldiers who had died in his attacks. The Turkish populace sought vengeance against this hated symbol.

Internationally, the apprehension of Ocalan presented a murkier dynamic for Turkey. In fulfilling its domestic imperative to arrest Ocalan, Turkey had much to lose abroad. The European Union was concerned about the possibility that, if apprehended, Ocalan would be railroaded through the Turkish military court system. There was also the concern that Turkey might execute Ocalan – a punishment that would further isolate Turkey from European standards of human rights. When faced with the overwhelming domestic pressures, however, Ecevit and Demirel saw no choice but to vigorously pursue Ocalan. They made a calculated assessment that the international fallout from an Ocalan arrest would be minimal.

Another major concern was that Greece might seek to publicly aid and harbor Ocalan. The Turks perceived the potential for a major crisis with Greece. On Monday February 1, the Turkish government bluntly warned the Greeks against such a move. Turkey's Foreign Ministry Undersecretary Kokmaz Haktanir said that "We expect Greece to be loyal to its assurances that it would not accept the terrorist leader."² Ecevit himself had said that, "Welcoming Ocalan means becoming an accomplice to his crimes."

Less publicly, the Turkish government twice summoned the Greek ambassador in Ankara to reiterate its warnings. Greek Ambassador Dimitrios Nezeritis assured the Turks that Ocalan was not currently in Greece and that if he did come, Athens would not let him in.³ It is likely that Nezeritis was unaware of the fact that Ocalan was at that time resting on the Greek island of Corfu.

The concern about the Greeks was tied to Turkey's major foreign policy objective of achieving membership in the European Union. For decades, Greece had blocked closer relations between the EU and Turkey. Turkey knew that without the assent of Greece, Turkey would never get into the EU. A crisis over Ocalan would not advance this goal.

The Greek Perspective: An Unenviable Position

Top Greek government leaders were almost immediately notified that Ocalan was present on Greek soil. They knew that Ocalan's presence in Greece was potentially explosive. Greek Prime Minister Costas Simitis and Foreign Minister Theodoros Pangalos needed to keep his presence secret in order to not antagonize the Turks. However, Greek foreign policy has always offered moral support to the Kurdish cause. This was partially due to the logic of "the enemy of my enemy is my friend." A comparison is also drawn between the Kurdish liberation struggle and the Greek's own battle against the Ottomans a century and a half earlier.

As in Turkey, domestic considerations were a major factor in dealing with Ocalan. Popular opinion in Greece had always run favorable to the Kurdish cause. If seen as being insufficiently supportive of the Kurdish cause, Greek nationalists could attack the already weak political position of Simitis and his ruling Socialist party (PASOK). If an error were made, PASOK's opponents would quickly jump on it. With European Parliament elections only a few months away and presidential elections in 2000, Simitis had to be cautious of a diplomatic blunder.

Internationally, Greece was well aware of the risks of supporting Ocalan too openly. First, such support threatened a major crisis with Turkey. Second, supporting Ocalan would have repercussions with Greece's partners in the European Union. Simitis had recently declared entry into the new common European currency a major foreign policy objective. A diplomatic row in the EU over Ocalan would only complicate this goal.

Greek decision-makers probably wished this whole affair would just go away. Most Greek officials would have preferred that Ocalan never had been able to enter Greek

territory in the first place. In general, Greece stood to gain little from their policy on Ocalan, while the risks of a misstep were significant.

Greece Weighs the Options

When Greek leaders found themselves presented with the *fait accompli* of Ocalan's presence on their territory asking for asylum, they were confronted with four options: 1.) Offer Ocalan asylum, 2.) Deny Ocalan asylum and expel him from Greek territory, 3.) Arrest Ocalan and extradite him to Turkey or 4.) Deny Ocalan asylum, but offer temporary shelter until asylum could be negotiated with a third party.

1.) Offer Ocalan asylum.

There were many ultra-nationalist Greeks who would have gladly offered Ocalan asylum. However, this option was never seriously considered at the highest level of the Greek government. On January 22, Turkey explicitly warned its neighbors that granting asylum to Ocalan would be regarded as a "hostile act."⁴ Granting asylum to Ocalan would likely be interpreted by Turkey as an act of war.

Harboring Ocalan would also put Greece at a diplomatic disadvantage with its European partners. Regardless of the legitimacy of the Kurd's claims, most countries (including the United States) believed Ocalan to be a terrorist. The United States and various EU states have long criticized Greece itself for a weak record on domestic terrorism. Any effort to aid Ocalan would inspire global criticism and bring unfavorable scrutiny on Greece's record.

2.) Deny Ocalan asylum and expel him from Greek territory.

The "cleanest" option for the Greeks would have been to simply eject Ocalan from their territory. This would have made Ocalan somebody else's problem.

For Greek leaders, this option was also fraught with risk. Politically, Simitis and his PASOK party would face severe criticism at home for such a move (once it became public, as it most likely would). Simitis would be open to attack from nationalist politicians on both the left and the right. He would be accused of having struck a political deal with the Turks and selling out a "liberation fighter."

3.) Arrest Ocalan and extradite him to Turkey.

For obvious reasons this option was never even considered. It would have been political suicide for Simitis. The resulting earthquake in Greek domestic politics would have been disastrous.

However, if it had been seriously considered, this option would have had major benefits for Greek-Turkey relations. If Simitis could have found a way to sell it to the Greek

public (a tough sell), he could have opened a new era in Greek-Turkish diplomacy. Nevertheless, Greek political leadership saw no need for better relations across the Aegean. They felt a genuine duty to aid the Kurds, a duty that superseded their national interests vis-à-vis Turkey.

4.) Deny Ocalan asylum, but offer temporary shelter until asylum could be negotiated with a third party.

This option sought to chart a middle course. Greece could conveniently hide Ocalan while Ocalan and the Greek government quietly sought out countries willing to offer asylum. This option avoided a direct confrontation with Turkey, while still addressing Greece's perceived imperative to aid the Kurdish cause. Most Greek leaders, profoundly aware of the possible consequences with Turkey, would have preferred this option to offering Ocalan asylum outright.

However, this option also had risks. It required perfect coordination and secrecy. If Turkey found out that Greece was offering Ocalan protection, a crisis could ensue. There was also the possibility of a Turkish (or even Israeli or U.S.) attempt to forcibly abduct Ocalan. If this operation were botched, then Greece would suffer the worst of both worlds – severely negative consequences at home and also major harm to its relations with Turkey.

PART C: **THE MISSTEPS OF GREEK DIPLOMACY**

Greece Makes a Decision

Greek government officials decided to offer Ocalan temporary shelter until third-party asylum could be negotiated. On January 31, Major Haralambos Stavrakakis, head of the Greek secret service, met with Ocalan in Corfu. He officially denied Ocalan's request for asylum, citing concerns that it would spark a war with Turkey. Stavrakakis then offered Ocalan the possibility of refuge in a Greek embassy. Foreign Minister Pangalos offered Ocalan assurance that this would be temporary until final asylum elsewhere was arranged.

Ocalan said he would think about it. After one more failed effort to seek refuge in Holland, he returned to Corfu and accepted Pangalos' assurance. The next day, February 2, Ocalan was transported to Nairobi, accompanied by four Kurdish associates and a Greek agent.

While in Nairobi, Ocalan did not seem to understand the need for secrecy. He reportedly took many cavalier risks such as using his cell phone and walking around outside of the embassy premises.⁵ Two days later, on February 4, the United States reportedly tipped off the Turkish authorities that Ocalan was in Kenya.

Over the next several days, the Turkish government launched a major clandestine effort to capture Ocalan. Only ten people in all of Turkey knew of Ocalan's presence in Kenya. An elite Turkish special operations team was dispatched to Nairobi with the mission of apprehending the terrorist.

After almost two weeks in Africa Ocalan became restless. He was doubting Greece's ability to find him sanctuary. The situation became more complicated when the Kenyan government confronted Greece with photographic evidence that Ocalan was on the property of the Greek embassy. The Greek ambassador told Ocalan that the Kenyans would fly Ocalan back to the European country of Ocalan's choice.

Ocalan felt his options were limited. Under very mysterious circumstances, Ocalan agreed to get into a car provided by the Kenyans. Somewhere on the way to the airport Ocalan was apprehended by the Turkish authorities.

Almost immediately Turkey announced the success of its daring operation. As the Turkish republic rejoiced, the scope of Greece's involvement quickly became apparent. Greece had failed in both of its major objectives: to protect Ocalan and to not antagonize the Turks.

Public Diplomacy and The Turkish Response

The degree of Greek complicity in the Ocalan became known to the world immediately. Turkey launched an all-out diplomatic offensive through press releases, official statements and reports of the capture leaked to the media. Over the course of the next week, increasingly sharp barbs were traded in public. Greece became the target of extremely threatening rhetoric. Turkey used this as an opportunity to attack Greece's support of Ocalan, but it also revived old allegations that Greece had been involved in supporting the PKK more generally. The Greek government, stunned by a furious domestic backlash, was paralyzed and unable to react effectively. Simitis realized that his attempt to "have his cake and eat it, too" had failed.

The first public statements out of Ankara accused Greece of being "caught red-handed in engaging cooperation with terrorism."⁶ On February 22, shortly after the capture was announced, President Suleyman Demirel stepped up the rhetoric. He called up Greek leaders to "explain to the international community how they came to support a terrorist murderer who has killed thousands of people."⁷ He branded Greece an "outlaw state" and suggested that it be added to the list of countries that supports terrorism.

Perhaps most ominous was the implied threat of military action. Demirel was quoted as saying that "If Greece continues its illegal behavior, we reserve the right given to us by international law to take the necessary measures for legitimate self-defense."⁸ This threat was quoted widely in Greece and abroad. Given the obvious importance of the Kurdish issue to Turkish national interests, there was no reason to believe that Demirel was exaggerating. The possibility of a Greek-Turkey military confrontation over support to the PKK had always been present.

During this time Turkey leaked reports that Ocalan had "confessed" during interrogation to receiving from Greece substantial aid for the PKK. It was reported that Greece had supplied Ocalan and the PKK with weapons, training facilities and rockets.⁹ Although there was ample reason to be skeptical about these claims, these accusations fed well into Turkey's propaganda against Greece.

The final Turkish response was an explicit linking of Ocalan to other Greek-Turkish points of contention. Turkish Foreign Minister Ismail Cem stated that in the wake of the this current crisis "Turkey will not talk with Greece about the Aegean, Cyprus or any other important problem."¹⁰

Although the rhetoric was sharp, Turkey did not take significant, concrete steps to punish Greece for its actions. Accusations that Greece had supported the PKK were not new – for many years Turkish propaganda had made that claim. Turkey's claim that negotiations on Cyprus and the Aegean would now be stymied did not make much sense. Prior to the Ocalan affair, there had been no significant progress these issues and no hint of any change in positions.

Furthermore, the Turkish leadership was realistic about how little it had to gain by severely retaliating against Greece. Its leaders were likely already looking ahead to the December 1999 EU Summit in Helsinki. EU states would make major decisions about the possibility of Turkish accession to the Union. Severely antagonizing Greece would work against Turkey's goal of attaining EU membership.

The Greek Reaction

For Greece, the domestic reaction was much more severe than the international fallout. Public opinion viewed this episode as one of the most shameful humiliations in the history of Greek foreign policy. Simitis's ruling PASOK government was confronted with a near-mortal blow.

Outrage in Greece had to do with multiple aspects of the failed diplomacy. First, many Greeks were angry that the government had been unable to prevent Ocalan from coming to Greece in the first place. They saw the Ocalan row as having been preventable if he had never been allowed to land in Greece. Second, the public was outraged that Greece had bungled its efforts to protect Ocalan so badly that he ended up in a Turkish prison. There was also a general distaste for the secret, clandestine actions of the Greek government.¹¹

Various political forces in Greece immediately used this humiliating affair to attack Simitis and his government. The loudest voices came from those parliamentarians who were openly supportive of Ocalan and the Kurdish cause. Even members of his own party, PASOK, were spoke of losing Ocalan to the Turks as a "major defeat." The Greek Communist Party referred to the "gangster-like kidnapping" that Greece had allowed to happen. PASOK's primary opposition, the New Democracy Party dubbed it "inhuman."¹² Even PASOK parliamentarians called for the resignation of Simitis's foreign policy team.

Greek government officials did not even try to defend their policy decision. Instead, several cabinet officials were singled out to take the blame for the foreign policy debacle. The first victims were the decision-makers most intimately involved in the Ocalan affair. Simitis forced out three of his cabinet officials. Foreign Minister Theodoros Pangalos was the primary fall guy. Pangalos was responsible for the failed attempt to hide Ocalan in Nairobi and find him third-party asylum. Also, shuffled out of the cabinet was Interior Minister Alekos Papadopoulos. Papadopoulos's ministry was in charge of the intelligence services that drew up the flawed the plans. The last victim was Public Order Minister Philipos Petsalnikos, the man whose ministry is in charge of the security forces. Petsalnikos was blamed for having allowed Ocalan to be smuggled into Greece in January.

An Unexpected Epilogue: Earthquakes and Rapprochement

Although the blow to the Simitis government was severe, it was not fatal. The cabinet reshuffling seemed to deflect most of the criticism. In terms of accomplishing other foreign policy goals, Simitis likely hoped that this affair would soon blow over. In terms of global attention, the world was more focused on Turkey. Concerns about Ocalan receiving a fair trial in Turkey overshadowed any major criticism of Greece's role in the affair.

The Ocalan affair was unlikely to affect Greece's major foreign policy objective of joining European Monetary Union. The financial impact of the Ocalan affair was a minor dip in the Athens stock market – nothing severe enough to affect Greece's EMU bid. The Ocalan fallout would not even have a significant impact in Greek-Turkish relations. As mentioned above, there had previously been no signs of progress in talks on Cyprus or on the Aegean. So, in effect, the situation could not have become much worse.

At that point, in the late winter of 1999, it seemed to many that Greek-Turkish relations would sour in the wake of the Ocalan affair. Indeed, the relationship seemed to have reached one of its period low points. The traditional issues of contention – Turkish EU membership, moral support to Kurdish separatists, Cyprus, the Aegean – seemed more distant than ever to resolution.

However, by the end of 1999 both states were hailing a new era in relations. Two major events led to a rapprochement. First, both Greece and Turkey were struck with a series of devastating earthquakes. The citizens of both states reacted with massive amounts of relief aid, combined with a genuine outpouring of sympathy for the quake victims. Second, the new Foreign Minister of the Simitis government, George Papandreou, struck a much more conciliatory tone with his Turkish interlocutors. A new round of Greek-Turkish talks were begun on so-called "soft issues," including tourism, trade and even terrorism. There was even some minor movement on Cyprus. By December Greece had gone so far as to agree finally to Turkish membership (with conditions) in the European Union.

When Ocalan was captured, there were many conspiracy theorists who claimed that Greece had secretly struck a deal with Turkey to hand over Ocalan. Although this is unlikely, the recent period of rapprochement suggests that the crisis of last February was really not as serious as first thought. Although the rhetoric was heated, we can surmise that quite backroom diplomacy may have led to a new understanding between Turkey and Greece. Perhaps this is part of a larger, coordinated effort within the Greek government to move away from its unproductive rivalry with Turkey. Moderates on both sides have gained influence and tried to improve relations.

In the summer of 1999 Ocalan was sentenced to death for his role in countless terrorist attacks. The trial was judged by all observers to be basically fair. Although the appeals process will drag on for some time to come, it is likely that Ocalan will receive severe punishment for his actions. Ocalan serves as a reminder of the incredible influence that one man may have on the diplomatic affairs of an entire region.

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