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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 ANKARA 001326

SIPDIS

EUR/SE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/08/2019
TAGS: PREL, PGOV, MOPS, AR, GR, TU
SUBJECT: DAS KAIDANOW'S INITIAL CONSULTATIONS IN TURKEY

Classified By: CDA Doug Silliman, Reasons 1.4 (b,d)

1. (C) Summary: GoT officials told EUR DAS Kaidanow during her initial visit to Ankara that:

-- Turkey is committed to the reconciliation process with Armenia, but Ankara also needs to see progress on Nagorno-Karabakh;

-- Ankara fully supports Talat and is giving him maximum flexibility, but is concerned that the Greek Cypriots are not motivated to deal. Turkey believes UN Special Envoy Downer needs to be more engaged in the process and wants UN SYG Moon to host a meeting for Talat and Christoufias at UNGA to give visibility to this issue;

-- There is ongoing Greece-Turkey bilateral dialogue regarding the Aegean, including on the issue of military flights. Greek allegations about Turkish air activities are often misleading, including recent allegations of Turkish harassment of a Greek civilian airliner;

-- The Kurdish Opening is at the forefront of Turkey,s domestic agenda. The government has a strong will to move forward and appreciates USG's continuing support on intel sharing against the PKK and working with Europe to curb the PKK's fundraising and political activities;

-- Turkey is concerned about Iranian efforts to form a Shiite coalition in Iraq and wants to work with the U.S. to support a more liberal, democratic, pro-Western regime in Baghdad. Rising tensions between Syria and Iraq are a concern;

-- FM Davutoglu will visit Iran the week of September 7 and will urge the Iranians to respond constructively to the P5 Plus 1 offer;

-- Turkey is committed to Nabucco as an important element of energy security and does not view Southstream as a competitor. End Summary.

2. (C) During her initial visit to Ankara September 3-4, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Ambassador Tina Kaidanow met with MFA Undersecretary Feridun Sinirlioglu and other senior MFA officials, Deputy Chief of the Turkish General Staff (TGS) GEN Aslan Guner, Energy Undersecretary Metin Kilci and Foreign Trade Undersecretary Ahmet Yakici. Ambassador hosted a dinner for DAS Kaidanow with pundits and thinktankers on September 3 and a separate dinner with senior GoT advisors and members of opposition parties on September 4. DAS Kaidanow and interlocutors agreed on the positive and close partnership between the U.S. and Turkey on a full range of key issues, including particularly Afghanistan/Pakistan and Iraq. Discussions in the various meetings focused on Turkey,s approach on Armenia, Cyprus, Greece, the "Democratic Opening" to address the Kurdish issue and energy.

ARMENIA-TURKEY: COMMITTED, NEED PROGRESS ON N-K

3. (C) MFA Undersecretary Sinirlioglu told DAS Kaidanow that Ankara is committed to normalizing relations with Armenia, and that the protocols to establish and develop diplomatic relations between Turkey and Armenia has created very positive momentum on which all parties should build. While acknowledging that Nagorno-Karabagh is on a separate track, Sinirlioglu stressed that Turkey also needs to see progress on Nagorno-Karabakh. This message was echoed by TGS Deputy CHOD Gen Guner during his meeting with DAS Kaidanow. Sinirlioglu also predicted that this sensitive step will be fiercely debated in parliament.

4. (C) MFA Deputy U/S Cevikoz, the MFA point person on

normalization with Armenia told DAS Kaidanow in a separate meeting that Turkey was pleased with how the press was being managed and thanked the U.S. for helping to manage the Azeris. "Turkey hopes this is the beginning of an end, rather than the end of the beginning," Cevikoz quipped, but said a lot will depend on how the next steps play out,

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including the Minsk Group meeting in Chisinau (on the margins of the CIS summit) between Armenian President Sargsian and Azerbaijani President Aliyev, and Sargsian's attendance at the World Cup qualifier match in Turkey between Turkey and Armenia on October 14.

5. (C) DAS Kaidanow applauded Turkey's courage in moving forward with normalization with Armenia. The U.S. understands that although the two issues are on separate tracks, it is important for Turkey to see progress on N-K in order to move forward with normalization. She underscored that the U.S. remains committed to finding a resolution on N-K and noted the appointment of Amb. Bradtke as the new U.S. co-chair for the Minsk Group as a reflection of the U.S. commitment. Sinirlioglu welcomed this announcement and said Turkey will look forward to working closely with Amb. Bradtke.

6. (C) Senior representatives from the opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) and the National Action Party (MHP) told DAS Kaidanow that opposition parties will reject the protocols without a commitment from Armenia to withdraw from occupied Azerbaijani territories. During the dinner hosted by Ambassador Jeffrey on September 4, CHP Vice Chair and former MFA Undersecretary Onur Oymen argued that Turkey normalizing relations with Armenia before an Armenian withdrawal would effectively condone the illegal occupation by Armenia. This, Onur concluded, would set a terrible precedent for other instances of illegal occupation in the South Caucasus, including the Russian occupation of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Hakan Fidan, senior advisor to PM Erdogan, retorted by noting that the protocol should be seen as a confidence building measure in advance of ratification by both parliaments and that the government understands the need for progress on Nagorno-Karabagh in order to receive opposition support for the protocols. DAS Kaidanow also noted that if Azerbaijan was willing to accept finalizing an agreement on the Madrid Basic Principles as a mark of success in the Nagorno-Karabakh process, Turkey should not be in the position of defining that success more stringently than Baku itself.

Cyprus

7. (C) MFA U/S Sinirlioglu told DAS Kaidanow that Turkey completely supports Talat's constructive, pro-solution approach and that Turkey has provided him full flexibility in the negotiations. Sinirlioglu expressed concern that the

Greek Cypriots seem unmotivated to negotiate and appear to be using Turkey's EU accession process as leverage to advance their goals in the negotiations. He warned that the window for a settlement is closing, pointing to the April 2010 presidential elections in the north as a likely turning point given the growing sentiments in the north against a settlement. He asked for U.S. support to encourage Special Envoy Downer to be more engaged in the process and to back Turkey's request for UN SYG Ban Ki Moon to meet jointly with Talat and Christoufias at the UN to highlight his personal interest in and draw international attention on the negotiations. DAS Kaidanow agreed that the UN should be fully engaged and that the window for a solution is limited. She said a UN SYG meeting with the two leaders could be a positive step and the US would consider supporting this.

Greece-Turkey

8 (C) MFA Deputy U/S Berk told DAS Kaidanow that relations with Greece are generally positive and outlined the ongoing semi-annual meetings of the bilateral steering committee in which he represents the Turkish side. Berk was upbeat in describing the discussions with Greece that were broadening and moving beyond the monotonous exchanges of their respective positions on the continental shelf. Berk said the Greeks had proposed five confidence building measures (CBMs) and that he had sent a letter in mid-August to the Greek PolDir to accept four of these CBMs and to propose an additional five new ones. Turkey was even willing to consider the selective extension of territorial waters beyond the six mile limit in

ANKARA 00001326 003 OF 004

certain areas (while not in others). DAS Kaidanow raised the issue of Turkish overflights of inhabited Greek islands, expressing concern that the potential for escalation or accidents was high. Berk warned DAS Kaidanow not to take Greek allegations of Turkish overflights in the Aegean at face value and rejected outright Greece's claim that Turkish fighter aircraft had passed close by a Greek airliner on August 31. Berk said that in addition to proposed CBMs, he had sent to his Greek counterpart a proposal for an "Aegean Code of Conduct" which he said could greatly reduce the chance of a mishap with potential for escalation. Turkey was ready to implement this proposal as well as the CBMs without prejudicing the legal positions on either side. While noting that the Greek government may be distracted with upcoming elections, Berk pointed to polling that showed PASOK in the lead. He commented that that Turkey is "not a stranger" to PASOK and considers Papandreou a good partner.

9. (C) TGS Deputy CHOD General Guner told DAS Kaidanow that there are improvements in Turkey-Greece relations and Turkey is looking to build on the personal relationships between the two militaries, especially between the service commanders.

Guner said the new Greek CHOD had served in Ankara when Guner was the J2 at TGS. Responding to concerns expressed by DAS Kaidanow about Turkish military overflights over populated Greek islands, Guner avoided getting into specifics, but said that there are CBMs ongoing. He concluded by stating that, "Man-to-man, military-to-military, we have no problems."

Kurdish Opening

10. (C) Sinirlioglu said there is a consensus of public opening supporting the GoT's "Democratic Initiative," and that there is strong political will to press forward. He expressed appreciation for the continuing support Turkey receives from the U.S. in the fight against the PKK and asked for the U.S. to continue pressing the EU to prevent political and fundraising activities in Europe. DAS Kaidanow agreed that the EU can be doing more and that the U.S. will continue to explore with the EU what more can be done to deny political and financial support for the PKK. TGS Deputy CHOD Guner flagged for DAS Kaidanow TGS Chief Basbug's July 25 announcement as key: it highlighted TGS's red lines but provided general support for any efforts that would not cross those lines. Guner concluded: "If there is something that we can do to bring the PKK down from the mountains, we will do it. But as long as they stay in the mountains, we will fight them."

Iraq

11. (C) Turkey's Special Envoy and soon-to-be ambassador to Iraq Murat Ozcelik joined Sinirlioglu's meeting with DAS Kaidanow and stated that he is working closely with Ambassador Hill. Ozcelik said he will focus on overcoming the challenge of elections and on passage of the revenue sharing and hydrocarbon laws once he arrives Baghdad. He said a smooth drawdown of U.S. forces is important, and urged the U.S. to not become overly focused on an "exit strategy," but to work with Turkey and others toward a more pro-Western Iraq: "We don't want another Iran in the region." He stressed that Turkey supports a fair election process and is following developments closely, particularly Iran's efforts to build a Shiite coalition in Iraq. He was encouraged by Maliki's decision not to join a Shia coalition, but remains concerned about Maliki's intentions. He asked that the U.S. and Turkey should work together for a constellation of political actors who are more liberal and democratic. He noted Turkey's concerns about growing tensions between Iraq and Syria. FM Davutoglu had just traveled to both countries and may do so again, following the September 9 meeting in Cairo. Ozcelik noted that Turkey will remain engaged with all groups in Iraq.

Iran/Syria

12. (C) Sinirlioglu noted that FM Davutoglu will be traveling

to Iran in the near future and will convey a "tough message" urging Iran to respond to the P5 plus 1 offer. He also said that Turkey's continuing engagement with Syria is difficult, but worth the effort as changing Syria will be important for the region.

Energy

13. (C) Turkey supports the free flow of energy to Europe, Sinirlioglu stated, and believes that energy security is one of Turkey's key contributions to Europe. He reiterated Turkey's support for Nabucco and said Southstream is not in competition with Nabucco. He agreed with DAS Kaidanow's assessment that supplies for the pipeline remains the lingering question mark over the project and said this is yet another reason to have a breakthrough in Armenian-Azerbaijan and Turkish-Armenian relations. Energy Undersecretary Metin Kilci in a separate meeting told DAS Kaidanow that Turkey is pushing hard in support of Nabucco, has high expectations for it, and is working on secondary agreements such as the Project Support Agreement (PSA) and setting up the national Nabucco companies. Kilci said he expects the project will begin within two years, compared to Southstream, which remains a long-term and costly project.

14. (U) DAS Kaidanow has cleared this cable.

SILLIMAN

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=====CABLE ENDS==

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C O N F I D E N T I A L ATHENS 001265

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 2034/07/17
TAGS: MARR, MOPS, PREL, TU, GR
SUBJECT: Aegean Issues: Thoughts on CBMs, Preparing for Turkish
Command of the CAOC

REF: BRYZA-SPECKHARD ET AL EMAIL 06/25/09

CLASSIFIED BY: Daniel V. Speckhard, Ambassador, State, US Embassy
Athens; REASON: 1.4(A), (B), (D)

1. (C) Embassy Athens welcomes the interagency focus on Aegean issues reflected in the sub-IPC reported informally in ref. We recognize that it will be important for Greece to contribute to an improved atmosphere in the Aegean that can diffuse the tension and create an opportunity for more substantive negotiations to resolve longstanding disputes.

2. (C) We offer the following thoughts on possible CBMs that the Greeks could be encouraged to consider as part of a coordinated effort with Turkey to reduce tensions. We assess that doing these things could create an atmosphere that would permit the Greek and Turkish military establishments - and particularly the respective air forces-- to engage in productive discussions initially on air safety issues, but eventually with an eye for the two governments to manage their differences in the Aegean. While we will encourage the Greeks to avoid the "you first" trap to improving relations, we do believe that an observance by both sides of the normal summer suspension of military activity in the Aegean would be key in allowing them and Turks to halt the downward spiral and start on a new more positive footing in September. We also offer some background on Greek thinking in preparation for TUAF participation in the command of the Larissa CAOC.

Possible CBMS:

2. (C) The following are possible confidence building measures that the Greeks could be encouraged to undertake in concert with reciprocal actions on the Turkish side to reduce tensions in Aegean and improve prospects for more substantial negotiations:

-- Indirect, but helpful for atmospherics:

* Recognize elected-Muftis in Thrace.

* MoD to vacate property proposed by GoG for Muslim Cemetery in Athens.

* GoG to publicly characterize the over-flights as "nuisance" rather than "threat to sovereignty."

-- Mil-Mil CBMs that have been in the works (most Mil-Mil CBMs would likely need direct over flights of Greek islands to stop first):

* No longer "tag" as hostile TUAf planes flying in the Athens FIR.

* Invitation to TUAf chief to Greece/HAF visit to Turkey.

* HAF to refrain from overflying treaty demilitarized islands while under NATO designation.

* GoG and GoT to observe original intent of previously agreed CBMs such as the "summer moratorium" of flight/intercepts. In the event both sides don't observe, we should nevertheless press the GAF to unilaterally observe it as regards FIR "violations" (but not in cases of TUAf over flights of sovereign Greek territory).

-- Other Mil-Mil CBMs:

* GoG to refrain from planning NATO exercises over treaty demilitarized, or disputed, islands.

* Maintain 3 mi standoff when intercepting TUAf per existing ROE.

* Agreement to fly unarmed.

* GoG to refrain from hard-line responses such as deploying frigate to waters off Agathonisi

* GoG to quietly shelve any Interpol or other legal extradition requests in case of Turkish pilot convicted in accidental death of Greek pilot.

Greeks on Larissa CAOC Command

3. (C) Our DAO has had a series of conversations with his GoG counterparts on the Larissa CAOC flag structure. The GoG expressed some chagrin at how the changes developed. They aver that the US proposed a changed flag structure for Larissa two days before the plan was decided at NATO, pulling the proposed US deputy commander in favor of a Turkish deputy, which the GoG did not veto "under duress." As a result, in Larissa both the commander and deputy will now rotate between Greek and Turk, always having a Turk in some command role. This is not "balanced" in Component Command Air (CC Air) Izmir where the commander is US but the deputy rotates between Turk and third country. It is only at Chief of Staff level where a Greek is in the normal rotation, leaving six months per year when no Greek is in any command role in Izmir. This is being played in the press as a big loss to the GoG, which is trying to redress in part by placing Greek officers elsewhere. With the above in mind, as we counsel the Greeks and Turks on preparing for a Turkish command role in Larissa, we should think creatively about how to offer the Greeks additional visibility elsewhere in the region. One option might be adding Greek Colonels to RC South (Naples) or to SHAPE. In addition, we must encourage the GAF and TUAFF to meet, and perhaps exchange officers in preparation for the CAOC change. Finally, we should press the respective air force commanders to meet, once we are able to point to a hiatus in over flights of Greek-inhabited islands by the TUAFF.

SPECKHARD

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 001637

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT ALSO FOR EUR/SE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/13/2019

TAGS: PGOV, PREL, TU, GR

SUBJECT: TURKEY'S LETTER TO GREECE: DEAR GEORGE

REF: ANKARA 1626

Classified By: DCM Doug Silliman, reasons 1.4 (b,d)

1. (C) Summary: The Turkish MFA proudly points to Prime Minister Erdogan's October 30 letter to Greece as a positive step for the future of bilateral relations between the two countries, but admits that much depends on Greece's response -- and the ongoing Cyprus negotiations. In the letter, Erdogan touched on almost every major bilateral issue, from the minority rights to illegal immigration. MFA officials insist that Turkey has the political will to move relations forward. However, the resumption of Turkish overflights of Greek islands in the Aegean could complicate things. End Summary.

2. (C) PM Erdogan sent a three-page letter to Greek Prime Minister George Papandreou on October 30 in response to Papandreou's visit to Istanbul on October 9 (scanned copy of

letter sent to EUR/SE 11/12). During a November 10 meeting with the DCM, MFA Deputy Under Secretary Halit Cevik passed us a copy of the missive. It listed Cyprus, Aegean matters, minority issues, and illegal immigration as key bilateral priorities for Turkey. According to Cevik, the inclusion of illegal migration, for example, is significant because of the importance Athens places on the issue. He said Greece has not yet responded to the letter, but noted that Ankara understands a reply is underway. The Greek Embassy here has also told us that it expects a response soon.

3. (C) The sending of the letter received widespread press coverage. Excerpts on key topics include:

-- Cyprus: Ankara is encouraging the Turkish Cypriots to seek settlement and Athens should do the same with the Greek Cypriots. Turkey suggests a meeting of four international players on Cyprus when the talks reach an appropriate level (Note: The level was not specified. End Note)

-- Aegean matters: Turkey offers to accelerate exploratory talks, adopt new Confidence Building Measures, and agree to a "Code of Conduct" between the two countries for the safe conduct of military flights in the Aegean. The Code of Conduct would be "non-prejudicial"; that is, it could not be cited as precedent in any future process that might seek to define respective sovereign rights in the Aegean.

-- EU accession: Erdogan said he is aware of the positive attitudes of Papandreou regarding Turkey's EU bid, and offered to boost cooperation. U/S Cevik personally commented that Greece's EU veto power is pivotal and should not be used to negate negotiations.

-- Minority issues: Erdogan recognized that the situation of minorities in both countries needs to be addressed.

-- Illegal immigration: the PM noted that this problem impacts both Turkey and Greece, and offered cooperation in the fight against criminal networks involved in smuggling refugees.

4. (SBU) Both the Turkish MFA and the Greek Embassy agreed that Cyprus is the key issue that continues to adversely affect bilateral relations. Cevik said that Turkey gives all the support it can to "TRNC President" Mehmet Ali Talat. Cevik and other MFA officials contend that Turkey has the political will to realize a Cyprus solution, but argue that the Greek Cypriots seem to want to buy time. He suggested that the "TRNC Presidential" elections in April are a "natural deadline:" every second year, elections on one side or the other of the island bring about the suspension of talks, but also an opportunity to push progress forward. The DCM said that the US is encouraged that both sides leaders remain publicly and privately committed to the process. The Greek Embassy, however, told us that Turkey's actions in December regarding the Ankara Additional Protocol will be crucial for both bilateral relations and the Cyprus negotiations. (Comment: The Greek Embassy's talking points may be dated. End Comment) Our Greek colleagues emphasized that Greece has been waiting for roughly three years for movement from Ankara on the Additional Ankara Protocol.

Moreover, EU accession cannot progress without movement on Cyprus and Athens needs concrete proposals for action, not a restatement of the issues.

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5. (C) The positive direction of the bilateral relationship also could be stalled with Turkey's resumption of Aegean overflights. The DCM noted positively Turkey's suspension of overflights of Greek islands during the election and government formation periods in Greece, but reiterated strong USG objections to such overflights, particularly over Farmakonisi and Agathonisi islands, which the US considers to be sovereign Greek territory per the 1947 Treaty of Paris. (Note: The Ambassador made the same points to Under Secretary Sinirlioglu (REFTEL). End Note) Cevik responded the suspension was only temporary, due to the Greek Parliamentary elections, and that Turkey had resumed its overflights on 6 November. He would not comment over which islands were involved. Cevik argued that it was not a sovereignty issue, but rather mere "flight formations."

6. (SBU) Looking ahead, Cevik suggested that Greece's response to the letter and a Turkish reciprocal visit by FM Davutoglu- probably before the December EU summit, could help set the tone for future relations.

COMMENT

7. (C) PM Papandreou's journey to Istanbul in October and his visit to former FM Cem's gravesite drew prominent press coverage and a positive emotional response from most Turks. Papandreou is held in high regard here. That set a promising tone as prelude for the Erdogan overture. However, the path ahead is hardly clear. The apparent resumption of Turkish overflights of Greek islands will be a complicating factor. Turkish MFA officials take comfort that Papandreou knows the deep-seated issues that serve as tripwires for the bilateral relationship.

JEFFREY

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 000057

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/SE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/10/2019

TAGS: PREL, MOPS, GR, TU

SUBJECT: TURKEY READY TO RE-ENERGIZE AEGEAN TALKS, BALL IN
ATHENS' COURT

REF: ANKARA 1637

Classified By: Pol-Mil Counselor Anthony Godfrey, Reasons 1.4
(b,d)

1. (C) Summary: MFA Deputy Director General Cagatay Erciyes told PolMilCouns on January 8 that Turkey is ready to re-energize Aegean talks with Greece, but is still awaiting a formal response to Erdogan's letter to Papandreou. The MFA wants exploratory talks to resume early in 2010, and said the Greeks have signaled an interest, but have not set a date. Erciyes explained Turkey's break of silence related to NATO's Peacetime Establishment Review was due to concerns about cross-border air connectivity. He said having a single air picture in the Aegean is important to Turkey and would help address tensions over claims of air space violations. The MFA is aware that direct overflights of Greek islands are counterproductive for efforts to improve ties with Greece and has pressed the Turkish military to minimize these maneuvers. Erciyes, however, rejected claims that the Turks are violating an agreement not to conduct exercises during national holidays and maintained that the Greeks conduct far more airspace violations than Turkey. End Summary.

Turkey Ready to Talk Aegean

2. (C) MFA Deputy Director General for Maritime Affairs Cagatay Erciyes told us that Turkey remains ready to re-energize Aegean talks, in line with PM Erdogan's letter to Greek PM and FM Papandreou (reftel). He reiterated that Turkey was ready to undertake the following steps to address differences in the Aegean: 1) re-energize exploratory talks on the Aegean; 2) fully implement agreed-to confidence-building measures (CBMs) and explore additional ones; and 3) establish a code of conduct for military flights in the Aegean (without prejudice to the legal/political positions of either side). According to Erciyes, although Greece provided a positive verbal response during FM Davutoglu's meeting with Greek PM and FM Papandreou on the margins of the December OSCE Ministerial in Athens, Ankara has yet to receive a formal reply to Erdogan's letter. Erciyes made clear that the Turks are ready to resume exploratory talks early in 2010, and said that while the Greeks have also signaled an interest, they have yet to set a date to meet.

3. (C) Erciyes said that the GoT is feeling more optimistic about bilateral relations with Greece following Papandreou's electoral victory. He said that although there have been 42 rounds of exploratory talks, they did not produce progress during the New Democracy government. Despite the optimism, Erciyes voiced concern about signals from Greece that it plans to appoint retired ambassador George Savvaides as the head of the Greek delegation to the talks. Erciyes noted that the talks had traditionally been held between the MFA permanent undersecretaries for both sides, and said that changing this format may be seen as giving less importance to the talks. Erciyes reiterated the GoT position that Turkey does not rule out any peaceful means to resolve disputes related to the Aegean, including via the International Court of Justice, as long as all issues are addressed and not only the issue of the continental shelf.

Military Overflights Counterproductive

4. (C) When asked how Turkish military overflights over Greek islands, including Farmakonisi and Agathonisi, contribute to Turkey's push to improve bilateral relations with Greece, Erciyes (please protect) acknowledged that the MFA views these flights as counterproductive and has been pressing the military to minimize these flights. Erciyes said the MFA was able to persuade the military to suspend the flights in the run-up to the Greek elections, and that although the moratorium had been lifted, the military is keeping these flights to a minimum. He urged us to "check the records," and expressed confidence that the numbers are much lower now than historical norms, and asserted that the Greeks conduct far more air space violations in the Aegean than the Turks.

Holiday Flights: Turkey Honoring Its Commitments

ANKARA 00000057 002 OF 002

5. (C) Noting that the Greek embassy in Ankara had recently raised with him concerns about Turkish military flights in the Aegean during Orthodox Christmas, Erciyes said Turkey is honoring its commitment to suspend military exercises during Greek holidays as it is one of the established confidence building measures (CBM) with Greece. He claimed that the two sides had agreed to suspend military maneuvers requiring Notices to Airmen and Mariners (NOTAMS) during holidays, but did not agree to suspend "normal activities" that would not require NOTAMS. While acknowledging that there had been a "gentlemen's agreement" to suspend all military flights during holidays, Erciyes alleged that the Greeks had violated this verbal agreement first. He said Turkey would be ready to consider formalizing an agreement to suspend all military flights during holidays as a new CBM.

Cross Border Connectivity

6. (C) Erciyes said Turkey broke silence on the NATO Peacetime Establishment Detailed Implementation Plans over concerns about insufficient progress toward establishing cross border air connectivity at the NATO CAOC in Larissa, Greece. He stated that Turkey attaches importance to having a complete air picture of the Aegean, and called it a confidence building measure that would help reduce tensions over frequent claims of air space violations: "Having a complete picture will help everybody see who is doing what."

Comment

7. (C) MFA officials continue to tell us that Turkey's "zero problems" policy applies to its relationship with Greece, and are hopeful about improving ties with Athens during the Papandreou administration. The Turks appear not only ready, but eager to resume Aegean talks. In Ankara's view, with PM Erdogan's letter to Papandreou, Turkey had taken the first step to improve bilateral relations with Greece and the ball is now in Athens' court to respond.

Jeffrey

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 000252

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT ALSO FOR EUR/SE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/15/2020
TAGS: CY, GR, PREL, TU
SUBJECT: GREECE-TURKEY: A SLOW START, BUT FORWARD MOVEMENT

REF: A. ATHENS 41
B. ANKARA 57
C. 09 ANKARA 1637

Classified By: POL Counselor Daniel O'Grady, for reasons: 1.4
(b,d)

1. (C) SUMMARY. Despite the eleven-week delay in Greek PM Papandreou's reply to PM Erdogan's October 30 overture, the Turkish MFA indicates that it views the response as positive and as a sincere attempt "to address our issues." The MFA envisions a foreign minister-level bilateral meeting, possibly as soon as February 18, followed by a prime minister-level meeting no later than June. Both the MFA and the Greek Embassy concur that Cyprus and the Aegean loom largest in the bilateral relationship, but the Greek Embassy also warns that illegal migration has become an "explosive political issue" in Greece, given the sheer numbers of illegal migrants intercepted there. On Aegean issues, the MFA welcomed the "fresh start" to which the Greek side was apparently agreeing. Greek PM Papandreou is widely admired in Turkey for his "seismic diplomacy" efforts in the previous PASOK government. Ankara hopes to make the most of his return to power. END SUMMARY.

2. (C) The Turkish MFA's Deputy Director for Greece/Cyprus, Kerim Uras, told us that Ankara for the most part is pleased with the reply letter from Greece PM Papandreou to Turkish PM Erdogan. It is "overall a good letter," and "tried to address our issues," Uras said. The GOT had earlier grumbled about the significant delay for the response (Erdogan's

letter was sent October 30 (REF C); the Papandreou reply came in mid-January) but said it recognizes that Athens has its hands full with its economic crisis, and that Papandreou also needed to ensure that diverse elements in his government were on board for his approach to Ankara. Uras suggested that the Papandreou government had not expected the Erdogan missive, but emphasized that the GOT had not wanted to catch the Greeks off guard but simply sought to make a comprehensive overture early in the Papandreou government's tenure.

3. (C) Uras said the Turkish MFA actually took issue with several elements in the Papandreou response. For example, the Greek PM's refusal to refer to "minorities" in Thrace, and also Papandreou's assertion that the two Cypriot communities should be left on their own to resolve the Cyprus Problem, without any outside engagement. Uras said this approach seems irresponsible, given that Greece has a significant role as a Guarantor Power, as does Turkey.

4. (C) We met separately with the Turkish MFA's Deputy Director for Maritime and Aviation Affairs Cagatay Erciyes (REF B). Erciyes (who gave us a copy of the page of Papandreou's letter which addressed Aegean issues) said that the Greek letter agreed to "re-energize" exploratory contacts which have taken place more than forty times over the past ten years. Erciyes said that while the letter did not respond directly to the proposals in Erdogan's letter for new confidence-building measures and an Aegean "code of conduct," the Greek side was "ready to discuss" them.

5. (C) In a separate discussion, the Greek Embassy's acting DCM, Stavros Venizelos, confirmed that the Papandreou letter discouraged any outside involvement in Cyprus, but noted that Greece's posture is more proactive than it might appear, and that Greece had actually lobbied hard with Christofias to ensure that the Greek Cypriot leader would agree to an accelerated schedule of talks leading up to the "TRNC Presidential" elections.

6. (C) Venizelos declined to give us a copy of the Papandreou letter, but briefed us on the main themes, in addition to Cyprus:

-- Aegean: (Erdogan had suggested re-energizing the exploratory talks and proposed CBMs and a code of conduct. (REF B)) On the former, Papandreou was receptive, but suggested a time limit, after which the issues would be brought to the International Court of Justice. In the meantime, both sides should refrain from "provocative statements." Ankara should cease overflights of inhabited islands.

-- Minorities: (Erdogan had pointed to various problems for the Turkish minority.) Papandreou insisted that Greece is obliged to respect the human rights of all Greek citizens. However, this is not a question of reciprocity. He in turn argued for Ankara's attention toward the Patriarchate, Halki Seminary, and the rights of Greek Orthodox-origin Turkish

citizens in Turkey.

-- Illegal Migration: Papandreou agreed that this is an

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important problem; welcomed the resumption of Turkey-EU talks on this issue; but urged improved implementation of the Greece-Turkey 2002 Readmission Protocol.

-- Economic Relations: (Erdogan had proposed allowing one- or two-day visa-free travel for Turkish citizens engaged in trade and commerce.) Papandreou noted that an MFA steering committee is examining this issue, but that Schengen regulations are inflexible and the EU has already disapproved of such an arrangement, but that Athens would ask again.

-- High-Level Strategic Cooperation Council: (Erdogan had proposed an overarching structure, featuring annual meetings between the two prime ministers together with many of their ministers.) Papandreou did not reject this proposal but suggested that a meeting at the FM-level begin to review it. He also stated that he would invite PM Erdogan to Greece sometime before June 2010. (Note: The Turkish MFA confirms that a PM-level meeting is envisioned but said the location remains unclear. End Note) Papandreou also suggested that individual ministers on both sides could explore issues such as energy, investment, culture, environment, transportation, illegal migration, and organized crime.

7. (C) Venizelos commented that the Aegean and Cyprus remain the two priority issues in the Greece-Turkey bilateral relationship, but that illegal migration is close behind. The latter has become an "explosive political issue" in Greece, he said, not least because 75 percent of all arrests in the EU of illegal migrants occur in Greece.

8. (C) COMMENT: PM Papandreou is held in high regard by most Turkish political elites, who remember fondly the "seismic diplomacy" era encapsulated by Papandreou's constructive association with the late Turkish FM Ismail Cem. Accordingly, Ankara hopes to make the most of Papandreou's return to power, as another element in it's "zero problems with neighbors" posture. We learned February 15 that a Greece-Turkey FM-level meeting might take place as early as February 18 in Istanbul.
Jeffrey

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