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# Is a "new era" post-elections really possible for Türkiye and Greece?



The elections in Türkiye and Greece are not over yet. After the first round, most of the fog surrounding their outcome has cleared. The elections in quarrelling countries coincided, which triggered concerns over disputed issues.

The prospects for the post-election period are such that the problems between 2 significant NATO members will be dealt with by the current actors and old acquaintances - President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis.

According to the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the two countries have had as many as 63 attempts to start a dialogue on all disputed issues, and none have succeeded.

But, to reduce the tension in the region of Southeast Europe, significant for the security and economy of the continent and the Middle East, only one negotiation success would be enough. Perhaps the next one will succeed.

## An unimportant pre-election topic

Relations with Greece were not among the crucial topics in the election campaign in Türkiye. They remained in the shadow of the principal economic issues, democratic institutions, identity polemics, and attitudes towards migrants.

This does not mean that disputed bilateral issues have disappeared, but only that the political camps have assessed that they would not have much impact on the election results, nor that they could bring any significant benefits.

They fell into the background after they

extended a hand to each other after the catastrophic earthquake in Türkiye at the beginning of February and immediately after the tragic train accident in Greece, in which 57 people died.

The so-called "earthquake diplomacy," in which Greece was among the first of many in the world to come to Türkiye's aid, had a calming effect on the temperamental election campaigns in both countries.

The Turkish "response" had the same effect. It was the first to send condolences to Greece and offer help after the train disaster on February 28.

The consequences of both tragedies are still fresh and had an important place in the election campaigns. The Greek-Turkish rapprochement gained an even bigger positive effect through the campaign in both countries.

Both leaders, Erdoğan and Mitsotakis, who have the best chances for a final election victory, highlighted this moment of solidarity as a basis for a new beginning.

"We don't have to wait for a catastrophe to strike. We are we destined to live in a state of permanent tension", said Mitsotakis during the election campaign, calling for improved relations with Türkiye if his New Democracy won the elections.

President Erdoğan responded in a conciliatory tone, expecting that hostilities could be put aside because they "significantly harmed both countries and should not persist".

"I hope that the elections in Greece and Türkiye will mark the beginning of a new era", said Erdoğan in his presidential campaign.

His conciliatory rhetoric towards Greece certainly had pragmatic, internal reasons to match his opponent Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, who is recognised as a more moderate option, even though he has been "firm" regarding the red lines of the national policy towards the neighbour.

## New mandate - new chance

The list of open problems is still long, and expecting the elections to be a turning point, followed by immediate solutions, is unrealistic.

It is not reasonable to expect Türkiye and 'It' Greece to make progress after the election while Türkiye's relations with the US and the EU are still bad", concluded Yücel Acer from the Yıldırım Beyazıt University in Ankara.

Nevertheless, if both state leaderships remain in that position, which is expected, this will present a major mitigating circumstance, which could open up a chance for a more serious rapprochement.

The fact remains: they completed important, even crucial elections as winners, and they are at the very beginning of their mandate, which gives them a chance to make risky political moves, which they would have abandoned at another time.

However, it is only a good circumstance, not enough to lead to progress, let alone to the "new era" that President Erdoğan has been talking about.

External actors must recognise the good climate that exists and influences Türkiye and Greece to step forward towards an agreement for a more tangible reduction of tensions, primarily in the Aegean region, regarding

militarisation and sea borders.

## Turkish expectations from "meddling" partners

While Türkiye prefers a bilateral approach, as it is economically, militarily, and politically more powerful than the other side, Greece traditionally seeks the influence of its partners in resolving disputes with Türkiye.

It is possible that with the new mandate of President Erdoğan, Ankara could correct its current dialogue strategy with Greece and accept greater participation of Western partners in the process (EU-US) because it needs their support regarding more important issues.

There is the remediation of the consequences of the catastrophic earthquake and damages, where estimates range from several hundred billion USD, which Türkiye could hardly provide given its significant economic problems.

Also, the problem with millions of refugees, as one of the pre-election topics, could be solved in the long term in cooperation with the EU and the US, not without them.

A much more active US approach after the elections in Türkiye is possible and will be announced. Due to the Russian aggression against Ukraine, the US is concerned about keeping Türkiye within the bloc it leads. On the other hand President Erdoğan, with a renewed mandate, views it as a space to realise something from his earlier, but unfulfilled, demands towards the US.