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AUDI ALTERAM PARTEM: ENHANCING TRUST-BUILDING IN GREEK-TURKISH RELATIONS THROUGH YOUTH EMPOWERMENT

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ABSTRACT

Greek-Turkish relations have been experiencing yet another turbulent and challenging time. Driven mainly by the regional conflicts and historical representations of the “other”, the publics of both sides are also negatively affected by the ongoing tense relationship. However, not much attention has been given to the role of youth in enhancing trust in Greek-Turkish relations. This paper proposes that by increasing the role of youth in bilateral relations, both countries will have more common ground to cooperate and negotiate instead of competing with each other. To understand why youth can play such a role in improving bilateral relations, we first aim at determining what youth think about Greek-Turkish relations in general. Secondly, we will focus on the factors that can contribute to better relations among youth. In this study, to consolidate our aims, a survey was distributed to all the participants of the annual Greek-Turkish Young Leaders Symposium (GTYLS). GTYLS participants’ perceptions of Greek-Turkish relations were meant to provide an overview from the perspective of youth. Additionally, based on the survey results, the impact of the Symposium on the participants’ perceptions of communities is observed on three themes: Trust, Empathy, and Future contact intention to understand the influence of the GTYLS on participants. With regard to the analysis and guided by the survey results, this study provides a number of requisite policy recommendations.

Keywords: Greece, Turkey, Trust, Youth, GTYLS

INTRODUCTION[1]

“Audi alteram partem”, which means “listen to the other side”, is lacking in today’s political atmosphere. Especially in the context of Greek-Turkish relations, several issues contribute to the lack of dialogue. As the substantial literature suggests, geopolitical competition, the image of “other”, populism, and identity structures are driving bilateral relations to a downward spiral which is detrimental to the population of both countries. However, not much attention has been given to the root causes of the misperceptions of the “other” among Greek and Turkish youth. Inspired by Cuhadar, Genc, and Kotelis’ research titled “A Greek-Turkish peace project: assessing the effectiveness of interactive conflict resolution” (2015) and interested in understanding the youth’s role in the Greek-Turkish conflict and its potential resolution, we propose research focusing on youth perceptions. We will focus on youth dialogue because, as the literature suggests, dialogue between peers is a significant element of youth empowerment to build a sustainable relationship for peace between communities (Ungerleider 2012) since it increases the active participation of youth. By enhancing the role of the youth in the two countries, we believe that the cyclical and harmful bilateral context of Greek-Turkish relations would eventually evolve into cooperation and solidarity among the two communities.

In this chapter, we will first lay out the main discussions in the literature, which focuses on Greek-Turkish relations, youth empowerment, and trust-building. Then, we will outline our methodology of survey research and its possible limitations. The following section will then analyze the ways in which youth empowerment can play a role in maintaining better relations between the Greek and Turkish communities, guided by the survey results. Finally, several policy recommendations will be provided along with a discussion section at the end.

[1] We would like to extend our sincere gratitude to all the participants from the GTYLS for our survey. Also, we would like to thank Prof. Dimitrios Triantaphyllou and Dr. Emrah Karaoguz from Kadir Has University and Dr. Cihan Dizdaroglu from Başkent University for their valuable feedback.

BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature that guides our research is threefold: Greek-Turkish relations, youth empowerment, and trust-building. To start with Greek-Turkish relations, a recent priority of the literature that dominates the fields of Political Science and International Relations is the issue of populism. As is the case elsewhere, populism also affects Greek-Turkish relations. Grigoriadis (2020) observes populism in the Greek-Turkish relations context along the left and right wings of the political spectrum and suggests that it erodes state institutions, liberal democracies, and interstate relations. A recent survey led by the Hellenic Foundation for European & Foreign Policy (ELIAMEP) and the Dianeosis research institute and conducted by MRB and KONDA reveals such an erosion based on populism in bilateral relations. In the survey, the escalating tensions between the two countries resulted in 70.2% of the Greek and 41.9% of the Turkish participants believing that a military incident between the two countries is possible (Nedos 2021).

Moreover, the role of institutional actors, such as the European Union (EU), is also being observed in the literature on Greece-Turkey relations. Although the EU had a positive impact on Greek-Turkish relations after 1999, the ideational framing of the European Neighborhood Policy consolidated the EU's borders and could not appeal to non-EU members and non-Europeans, such as Turkey (Rumelili 2007). Furthermore, the NATO membership of both countries since 1952 has provided ground for cooperation and peace, although their relations were strained on multiple occasions. The United States' presence and intervention arguably prevented more escalations (Binder 2012).

Secondly, the literature on youth empowerment is also another significant area developing over the past decade. A seminal work by Jennings et al. (2006) creates an alternative model to youth empowerment by focusing on a safe environment, participation, engagement, and power-sharing. Based on these elements, the "YES!" project was designed by Wilson et al. (2008) to increase social action among elementary and middle school children.

An underrepresented part in the youth empowerment literature is the role of youth in inter-state conflicts and peacebuilding, although there is evidence that it may play a key role.

For instance, in the Cyprus issue, which causes multiple tensions for Greek-Turkish relations, the role of youth is also key in shaping intercommunal relations. However, as Dizdaroğlu (2020) suggests, more than half of the young Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots believe that there will never be a solution to the Cyprus issue, which prevents the chances for resolution.

Finally, the literature on trust-building is also necessary for our research, particularly because of its significant societal and international roles. Here, a seminal piece of research by Kelman (2005) suggests that in the cases of protracted conflicts, such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, "interactive problem solving" is a substantial method that can help towards conflict resolution. Eventually, trust-building measures are maintained and developed. This could be applied to Greek-Turkish relations, as they would develop solutions with more youth participation and inclusion. According to research conducted in Northern Ireland and Cyprus, there is evidence supporting that high-quality contact experiences between communities increase the intention for future contact, meaning that trust-building can have an effect on future behavior (McKeown & Psaltis, 2017). Pettigrew and Tropp (2000) showed that intergroup contacts have a negative relationship with prejudice. In other words, when contact between groups in conflicts increases, the level of prejudice decreases. In that sense, intergroup contact allows for building trust between groups (Tam et al., 2009). An event such as the Greek-Turkish Young Leaders Symposium (GTYLS) represents an opportunity for trust building among youth from Greece and Turkey because it creates an environment conducive to high-quality contact and incentivizes participants to change their future behavior through the promotion of collaborative initiatives after the completion of the Symposium.

METHODOLOGY AND LIMITATIONS

The Greek Turkish Young Leaders Symposium (GTYLS) is a forum between young Greeks and Turks aiming to establish dialogue and networking between both communities. [2] In 2021, the GTYLS held its seventh annual event as an online event for the second year in a row due to the Covid19 pandemic. The GTYLS represents a good example of youth empowerment, trust, and empathy-building because it offers thematic sessions as well as workshops. Symposium participants are empowered through the knowledge they gain about the subject matter and the opportunities they have to collaborate with people from the “other” side, thus creating collaborative relations and challenging the prevalent narrative of the “other” as an opponent. By the end of the event, participants form mixed groups, i.e., from both communities, and are required to create project ideas that are doable and address issues of relevance to Greek-Turkish relations. Collaboration towards a common goal increases cross-cultural communication, empathy, and trust-building among Greeks and Turks. For this reason, GTYLS participants offer a solid sample for measuring empathy, trust, and future contact intentions between the Greek and Turkish communities.

The authors used an online survey to measure the change in GTYLS participants’ perspectives and potential future behavior. Survey questions measured the three aforementioned concepts: trust, empathy, future contact intentions. Besides demographic questions, participants are also asked questions regarding Greek-Turkish relations. The survey was organized in nine sections and distributed to all GTYLS participants (that took part in the first six editions of the Symposium) through the Symposium’s participant mailing list. The mailing listing was provided by the organizers of the symposium with their permission. The survey was distributed to all the GTYLS participants individually via email. Out of all the participants, 68 people attempted to fill the survey, and 58 people completed it. The survey was prepared on the Survey Monkey platform and took about 10 minutes to complete. The survey questions can be viewed in the link below.[3]

The survey conducted also had several limitations for observing the three concepts in question. First, due to the Covid-19 travel restrictions, only one (2020) out of six Symposiums was conducted online, making the prior five symposiums face-to-face events (2015-2019). We assume that the participants (10) who only attended the online symposium might show qualitatively different results than face-to-face participants. Moreover, there are also participants who attended multiple symposiums, both face-to-face and online (4). Thus, this might create different results, which might have an impact on the scales that were used.

Finally, this study is designed as two-fold: first, the survey with the GTYLS participants; and second, semi-structured in-depth interviews. Following this study, the survey results will be triangulated with semi-structured interviews that offer more content and detailed answers from the participants, something which is not possible with the survey methodology. (Adams 2015)

YOUTH IN GREEK-TURKISH RELATIONS: THE GREEK-TURKISH YOUNG LEADERS SYMPOSIUM

To start with the demographics of the survey participants, it is observed that the majority of the participants (44.83%) are between 31 and 35 years old. Moreover, the GTYLS participants are evenly split in terms of their nationality (Greek or Turkish) and gender (50%). In addition, most of the survey participants have master’s degrees (56.90%). For the questions regarding the GTYLS, most participants reported having participated in the online symposium in December 2020 (24.14%), followed by the one held in Kavala in 2019. Because the 2020 symposium was the only one held online, most respondents attended the symposium in person (75.86%). An overwhelming majority of the participants stated that they only participated once in the symposium (93.10%).

[2]Further information on the GTYLS can be found at <https://greekturkishrelations.org/>.

[3]The Survey is available at <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1TvJKISugXb3-ArF5mFRfhJofnwym-PfQw9wjQ-8dmH4/edit?usp=sharing>.

Participants either heard about the symposium through someone (46.55%) or via social media (41.38%). Participants also recommended the symposium to 6 or more people in their social circles (29.31%).

ANALYSIS: ROOT CAUSES OF NEGATIVE PERCEPTIONS OF THE OTHER

When asked about Greek-Turkish relations where participants could choose multiple options, 82.76% of the participants answered that they are neighbors, and 68.97% said they are in geopolitical competition. 39.66% think that there is much conflict in the relationship. Accordingly, 75.86% think that bilateral relations are bad. As to the causes of bilateral conflicts, participants suggest that the Cyprus issue and geopolitical competition lead to conflict. On the other hand, participants were asked the first three words that come to their minds regarding Greek-Turkish relations. As Figure 1 shows, participants mentioned both negative words as well as positive connotations such as “peace”, “neighboring”, “similarities”, or “friendship”. Thus, it can be highlighted that they are aware that Greek-Turkish relations are like a coin with two different sides. While there is the presence of differences on certain political issues/interests, there is also a side consisting of good neighborly relations.

Moreover, to triangulate the close-ended questions, participants were asked to answer open-ended questions about the root causes of conflict in Greek-Turkish relations. As seen in Figure 2, mostly “history” and “historical competition” or “historical disputes” were pointed out by the participants. In other words, it can be argued that a motivated group of young Greeks and Turks interested in bilateral relations think this is not only an issue of daily politics but that there are unresolved problems with a long historical background. Indeed, historical narratives have been fueling mutual mistrust, prejudice in the negative perceptions towards each other. (Heraclides 2011) Additionally, like the closed-ended answers, some participants mentioned geopolitical rivalry as one of the root causes for unstable relations in the open-ended questions.

Besides the aforementioned points, participants also underline the fact that “populism/populist discourses” or “politicians/politics” have an impact. For instance, one participant said that “politicians from both sides use the problem [Greek-Turkish relations] to manipulate their voters” while another suggested that the “interests of both sides and both governments use this [Greek-Turkish relations] as a distraction from domestic issues”. These arguments match with the answer to the question of “How do you evaluate your government’s policy towards Greece or Turkey.” Most of the respondents (39.66%) stated that they find their governments neither successful nor unsuccessful towards Greece or Turkey. 20.69% stated their government’s policy is very unsuccessful, 24.14% stated that it is unsuccessful, while only 15.52% suggested that it is successful. No one replied that it is very successful.

When asked about potential solutions to ease Greek-Turkish relations, most respondents referred to political dialogue (79.66%), civil society cooperation (71.19%), economic cooperation (61.02%), and youth empowerment (57.63%). The prevalence of political dialogue as the most popular answer to this question is in concurrence with a general trend observed in this section of the survey: political leadership in both countries plays a significant role in Greek-Turkish relations. Although the GTYLS cannot directly influence government policies, it contributes significantly to civil society cooperation and youth empowerment, which are also highly popular choices among survey participants.

ANALYSIS: FACTORS THAT CAN CONTRIBUTE TO BETTER RELATIONS AMONG YOUTH TRUST, FUTURE CONTACT INTENTION, AND EMPATHY

As mentioned in the literature review, this study builds its argument on building trust, empathy, and future contact intention among youth.

The GTYLS is a rare example of an event that allows young Greek and Turks to come together for networking purposes. In that regard, we try to evaluate how such an event can impact the participants on three levels: future contact intention, trust, and empathy which are components of interactive problem-solving in conflicts and trust-building among youth.

To measure *future contact intention*, this study utilized the scale previously used by Mckeown and Psaltis. (2017) The scale has three questions, such as “I would like to know more about the other community” on a 5 points Likert scale. In this scale, higher scores show more intention, while lower scores show less.

To measure trust, the Intergroup Trust scale previously used by Tam et al. (2009) was utilized. As in the case of the *future contact intention* scale, higher scores show more while lower scores show less. The questionnaire consists of 4 questions, such as “I trust ordinary people of the other community when they say they want peace”.

Additionally, the empathy levels of respondents were compared before and after. To measure it, this study adapted the empathy scale from Malhotra and Liyanage (2005). The questionnaire has five questions, such as “I would get very angry if I saw a Greek/Turkish person being ill-treated” on a 7-point Likert scale. In this case, lower scores indicate a higher empathy level, while higher scores indicate less.

All the scales were provided two times in the survey. First, respondents were asked to fill the questionnaire according to their feelings before taking part in the GTYLS. The second time, they were asked to fill the questionnaire according to their feelings after taking part in the GTYLS.

Statistical analysis was run through the SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) software. Initially, the results were checked to see whether they meet the normality requirements and were normally distributed. The test results can be seen in Table 1. We believe that since GTYLS participants already possess high-level trust, contact intention, empathy scores accumulated in higher levels, normality tests failed.

As a result of this, we decided to do nonparametric analysis on scales and conduct a Wilcoxon Signed-rank test suitable for non-normal distributed data to compare before and after results (Blair and Higgins 1980).

Table 1 and Table 2 shows that for all grounds, when means are compared, there is an increase in a positive manner. Additionally, Table 2 shows Wilcoxon test results and indicates Future Contact Intention-After was statistically significantly higher than Future Contact Intention-Before $Z = -2.318$, $p = .020 < 0.05$. In others, it can be argued that after the Symposium, participants started to have more future contact intentions towards their neighbors. To illustrate, our survey questions whether participants recommended the GTYLS to their peers can be given as an example. Participants recommended the symposium to their social spheres by 6+ people (29.31%), while more than 50% of them recommended it to at least two of their peers. This table also indicates that Empathy-After scores were statistically lower than Empathy-Before scores $Z = -3.355$, $p = .001 < 0.05$. Since for the Empathy scale, lower scores indicate a higher level of empathy, we can argue that participants' left the event with more empathy towards the other community. Lastly, when trust scores are compared, even though according to the means of Trust-Before and Trust-After scores, there is an increase in trust, Wilcoxon test results indicate no statistically significant difference: $Z = -1.349$, $p = .177 > 0.05$. We interpreted that improving trust within a three-day event is harder than improving empathy and future contact intention. Although it requires more time and contact, enhanced empathy and contact intention are important foundations that can be a strong base to build trust. Christie (2006) argued that intergroup contacts would enhance the trust-building process and cooperative relations among groups. Enhancement of empathy towards each other can pave the way to collaborate more while diminishing the negative perceptions that cause mistrust. (Malhotra and Liyanage 2005) Therefore, we underline that youth involvement in networking events can be a significant tool in reconciling Greek-Turkish relations since it might generate actively engaged and dynamic youth collaboration.

FINDINGS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Focusing on youth empowerment has long-term benefits for interstate cooperation and dialogue. Thinking of the youth as potential policy entrepreneurs, they could and should be part of conflict resolution mechanisms between states, such as Greece and Turkey. For this reason, this study focused on youth empowerment in developing the relations between two countries, using the Greek-Turkish Young Leaders Symposium (GTYLS) as the event that has prompted youth empowerment. As the descriptive analysis of the survey and the statistical analysis on trust, empathy, *future contact intention* showed, the GTYLS participants are aware of the existing problems which need to be addressed for reconciliation. Furthermore, even though they already were strongly motivated, the GTYLS positively influenced them on the three themes, leading to more cooperation and dialogue among youth.

We believe that this study can be an example for further studies as well. Due to time limitations, we cannot compare the results with a control group. For larger studies, control groups can be included to bring more generalizable results and comparisons among youth. We believe that such a study would help create a great roadmap to empower the youth in greater involvement in bilateral relations.

In light of our study, the following policy recommendations aim to improve the efficiency of youth involvement in developing Greek-Turkish relations:

- As *future contact intention* analysis shows, participants to the GTYLS have high intentions to engage in a dialogue with their neighbors. Therefore, a youth platform that ensures contact between Greeks and Turkish youth can be established. Through this platform, young people can initiate further projects, ideas, and the like. In other words, youth-led initiatives should be encouraged and embraced to be actively involved in bilateral relations.
- As GTYLS participants pointed out in the survey, the youth consider historical narratives a root cause of unstable relations between Greece and Turkey.

Hence, symposiums or events like the GTYLS can add sessions focusing on tackling historical narratives to their curriculums.

- According to the survey results, GTYLS participants suggest civil society cooperation as a policy area that could improve bilateral relations. Thus, dialogue between civil society actors from Greece and Turkey should be increased to develop sustainable cooperation. Civil society dialogue can focus on either encouraging political dialogue or creating cross-border synergies on other issues such as the economy, the environment, culture, and the like.
- Youth mobility between Greece and Turkey should be supported. As previous experiences and our survey results show, interaction among youth helps create favorable relations between peers. Mobility opportunities would contribute to dealing with negative perceptions.
- The Cyprus issue is one of the reasons that makes Greek-Turkish relations more sensitive. Much as the literature demonstrates, according to our survey results, the youth also consider Cyprus as one of the root causes of complex relations between Greece and Turkey. Thus, another platform can be established to allow young Greeks, Turks, and Cypriots to engage in dialogue.

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APPENDICES

Figure 1: Word Cloud Q11. What are the first three words that come to your mind about Greek-Turkish relations?



Figure 2: Word Cloud Q17. What are the root causes of unstable relations between Greece and Turkey?



Table 1: Descriptive Normality Test Results

Variables		Statistic	Std.Error
EmpathyBefore	Mean	11.9310	.72166
	Std.Deviation	5.49597	
	Skewness	1.695	.314
	Kurtosis	3.933	.618
EmpathyAfter	Mean	10.4483	.70868
	Std.Deviation	5.39712	
	Skewness	1.676	.314
	Kurtosis	3.301	.618
FutureBefore	Mean	13.0000	.26831
	Std.Deviation	2.04339	
	Skewness	-.626	.314
	Kurtosis	-.631	.618
FutureAfter	Mean	13.6034	.26831
	Std.Deviation	2.04339	
	Skewness	-.626	.314
	Kurtosis	-.631	.618
TrustBefore	Mean	14.8621	.34996
	Std.Deviation	2.665523	
	Skewness	-.319	.618
	Kurtosis	1.270	.618
TrustAfter	Mean	15.2069	.38871
	Std.Deviation	2.96031	
	Skewness	-.877	.314
	Kurtosis	1.576	.618

APPENDICES

Table 2: Wilcoxon Test Results

		N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	Z	P
FutureAfter - FutureBefore	Negative Ranks	6 ^a	12.83	77.00	-2.318	.020
	Positive Ranks	19 ^b	13.05	248.00		
	Ties	33 ^c				
	Total	58				
EmpathyAfter - EmpathyBefore	Negative Ranks	35 ^d	21.41	749.50	-3.355	.001
	Positive Ranks	8 ^e	24.56	196.50		
	Ties	15 ^f				
	Total	58				
TrustAfter - TrustBefore	Negative Ranks	15 ^g	20.70	310.50	-1.349	.177
	Positive Ranks	25 ^h	20.38	509.50		
	Ties	18 ⁱ				
	Total	58				

a.FutureAfter < FutureBefore, b. FutureAfter>FutureBeore, c. FutureAfter=FutureBefore,

d.EmpathyAfter<EmpathyBefore, e.EmpathyAfter>EmpathyBefore, f.EmpathyAfter=EmpathyBefore

g. TrustAfter < TrustBefore, h.TrustAfter>TrustBefore, i.TrustAfter=TrustBefore

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