



PERSPECTIVES ON EUROPE

Limits of the Changing Border Regime: Insights from the Greek-Turkish Borderland

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My research is on the local impacts of what I call the change toward a 'semipermeable' border between Greece and Turkey. More specifically it seeks answers to the following questions: How does the change from confrontational to cooperative relations between Greece and Turkey affect border-crossing practices at the local level? Who is 'allowed' to cross under the new border regime, compared with the old Lausanne regime, and for what purposes?

Following in the footsteps of the critical anthropology of borders literature that consider borders as contact zones where politics of identity construction, categorization, and exclusion can be most clearly scrutinized (Ballinger 2003; Green 2010; Heyman 2008; Paasi 2009; Sparke 2004; Vila 2003; Wilson and Donnan 1998), in my PhD research, I trace the interactions along/on/across the Thracian borderland, and look at how citizenship and nationhood are performed/reproduced/contested/redefined in a border region where the 'minority', 'transit' or 'illegal' migrant and the 'local' encounter each other. In a nutshell, my goal is to capture the layered meanings that the self and the other as the 'outsider' take, and the dynamic nature of what van Houtum calls 'bordering' space and people.

Since the early twentieth century, the Greek-Turkish border played

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both a discursive and material role for the nation-building process of both states, pitting one against the other as a security threat to their national unity and as outsiders of their national bodies. The 1923 Lausanne Treaty and the compulsory population exchange sealed the border of Thrace, once a unified Ottoman region, by dividing it into Eastern Thrace (Turkey) and Western Thrace (Greece), and established a national security regime along the Thracian border. This regime also precipitated overt exclusionary practices against minorities – i.e., displacement of minorities from the border region despite existing legal provisions that protect the Muslim minorities in Greece (Cowan 2008; Anagnostou and Triandafyllidou 2007; Oran 2004) and non-Muslim minorities in Turkey (Bali 2008; Cagaptay 2006; Dündar 2008; Karabatak 1996).

The same Greek-Turkish border in the Thrace region has recently become a critical node for migrants from countries with ongoing political, economic, security, and environmental problems (such as Sudan, Iraq, Afghanistan and, most recently, Syria) to enter the European Union (EU), reaching a daily number of between 250 and 300 arrivals from Turkey into Greece since 2010 (ProAsyl 2012). At the end of this past summer, the intensity of unauthorized border-crossings had shifted from the land border on the Thrace region to the sea border on the Aegean, which used to be more intense before 2010. This shift occurs very frequently in response to the increasing intensity of controls in either one of these sites. Yet these measures seemed to have precipitated a new ‘security regime’ for which the Europeanization of migration policies have paved the way. These ‘security regimes’ have been defined as the national and international rules, discourses, and practices that criminalize and victimize the migrants (Aradau 2004; Diez and Squire 2008; Huysman 2000; Migreurop 2009; ProAsyl 2012; van Munster 2009), “police them at a distance” (Bigo 2002) as well as manage and control the border crossings (Geiger and Pécoud 2010; Triandafyllidou and Ambrosini 2011).

It is in this context that ‘transit’ migrants try every possible way to enter (through legal and

illegal ways) into the EU to seek asylum or, in the absence of guest worker schemes, to acquire and maintain a legal status to work and stay in Europe. In response, they face multiple exclusions either on the border or after they cross it. In the past few years, new provisory detention centers were constructed in Evros (Western Thrace, Greece) and Edirne (Eastern Thrace, Turkey) to contain this migration at the first point of entry into the Schengen zone. The local presence of the intelligence-driven EU agency FRONTEX since 2010 in the region was recently welcomed with the cooperation agreement between FRONTEX and Turkey in May 2012, while at the same time Greek police deployed 1,881 additional officers and equipment to the border and around 2,000 more in Athens for the sweep operation Xenios Zeus launched on July 30, 2012.

Juxtaposed onto the new security regime are the rising cross-border trade and business, tourism, and cultural interaction mainly with the EU-ization of the bilateral relations since the second-half of the 1990s. The most recent example of this cooperation was the meeting of Turkish President Gül and Greek Prime Minister Samaras on March 4, 2013, when they both expressed their happiness about Greek investments in Turkey and vice versa during the past 10 years and underlined the possibility of new cooperation opportunities on energy and tourism (*Hürriyet DailyNews*, March 4, 2013). All of these developments show that the territorial borders (manifested in the variations in the limits of spatial mobility of migrants, traders, tourists, students, etc.) as well as societal boundaries (manifested in the variations in the limits of social mobility of national minorities as well as new migrants) along and across the Greek-Turkish border are going through a substantial transformation compared with the more confrontational policies of the pre-1990s period.

Many scholars have pointed out that the Greek-Turkish rapprochement of 1999 was rooted in a process of redefinition of political and strategic interests of the two states in the post-Cold War context. Moreover, it was argued at that time that the EU membership of Greece, together with the possible membership of Turkey, was the

main determinant for changes in the definition of citizenship, the state-society relations, the position of minorities in Greece and Turkey, as well as the changing perceptions of and direct relations between Greece and Turkey (Anastasakis et al. 2009; Grigoriadis 2008; Gündoğdu 2001; Kadioğlu 2009; Onar 2009; Rumelili 2003, 2005; Sofos and Özkırımlı 2009). However, just as the historical relations of the two states and societies across the border are disregarded in recent critical security and migration studies, the scholars of Greek-Turkish relations have also overlooked the re-securization of the Greek-Turkish border in the face of the EU-ization of migration and border policies, and focused solely on the EU-ization of the bilateral relations and issues pertaining to these two states and societies. My research aims to fill this gap in the literature on Greek-Turkish relations and critical security and migration studies. Inspired by established scholars of international regimes (Haggard and Simmons 1987; Mazower 1997; Zolberg 1989), and specifically Hess's (2012) application of ethnographic regime analysis to transit migration, I use the term 'border regimes' in order to explore the multiple ways in which domestic and international rules, norms, regulations, and practices shape the imagery of nation-state borders and trace the possible impacts of this new notion of security and threat on (re-)construction of notions of nationhood and citizenship. I give particular emphasis to the impact of Europeanization of the minority, migration, and citizenship regimes and the regional restructuring since the end of the Cold War that eased border crossings.

After my pre-dissertation field trip to the Thracian border, for my ongoing PhD research I decided to look closely at the nuances of this changing border regime on the following issues: (a) the recent security cooperation to refrain new irregular migrants from entering the EU; (b) the regional economic interaction that seems to be developing throughout the past few decades; and (c) the increasing levels of cultural interaction despite ongoing discrimination against the national minorities in each state and against the nationals

of each state within the territory of the other. Following the recent emphasis on the *relations and process of bordering*, rather than borders as outcomes *per se* (Green 2010; Newman 2006; Paasi 1998; van Houtum 2005), I claim that in order to disentangle this process that is embedded in the international political order, we need to look at it over time – since the more confrontational period of 1974 Cyprus Intervention until the 2012 Operation Xenios Zeus of Greece against illegal migration – and on these three dimensions: (1) the discursive borders of interstate relations, (2) cross-border interactions on the ground, and (3) the imagined borders dividing those included as 'normal'/insider and those excluded as 'threat'/outsider.

To address these issues, I utilized various methodological tools. To capture the macro-level, I engaged in a discursive analysis of one local and one national newspaper from both Greece and Turkey. The two national papers (*Hürriyet* and *Kathimerini*) were chosen as mainstream (center-right) papers with wide readership and the local papers (*Hudut* and *Elefteri Traki*) are chosen according to the criteria of widest distribution and readership in order to capture the 'voice' of the border. I compared the local and the national discourses on the three issues mentioned with a focus on 10 events (between 1974 and 2014). To capture the micro-level of transformations in the discursive constructions of the Thracian border, I conducted open-ended, semi-structured interviews and participant observations mainly in Orestiada and Alexandroupoli (Greece) and the center of Edirne and Enez (Turkey), especially in places where daily talks about the border and border crossers may emerge, such as marketplaces and touristic sites. Additionally, I conducted interviews with local notables, local stakeholders, local state actors or, namely, 'street-level bureaucrats' implementing policies pertaining to minorities, migrants and cross-border relations, and officers from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and FRONTEX (present on the Greek side).

My tentative analysis of the newspapers disentangled a striking difference between the

local and the national newspapers within each country in terms of the issues and actors that are pointed out/referred to/alluded to and given voice to. Take for example the year of 1999, when there was a considerable shift from antagonistic relations (with the capturing of Öcalan, the head of the Kurdish armed struggle, in February at the Greek Embassy in Kenya) toward more friendly ties (after the devastating earthquakes in Turkey and later in Greece), which was manifested in the news articles in the Greek local paper *Elefteri Traki* that emphasized “solidarity with Kurdish people” in early 1999 and “agreement with Turkey about terrorism” at the end of the year. The coverage in *Hürriyet*, the national Turkish paper, remains at the level of high politics, with a focus on state actors such as the United States, the EU, Russia, and Athens (as is also the case in the Greek national paper *Kathimerini*), whereas the Turkish local paper *Hudut* focuses on the repercussions of high politics on the everyday life of the people – e.g., the way truck traffic to Europe was affected after Öcalan’s case. After the earthquakes the focus of local papers was on a visit by local economic and political actors to the Greek Embassy in Edirne to pay gratitude as well as to underline their demand for visa exemption for Turkish citizens to visit Greece for tourism and business purposes.

Yet during my interviews, I also found out that the everyday interactions and cross-border trade with Greece have not been very affected during such moments of political conflict at the state level. Looking at the interactions at the local level over the years also shows that there has been an increasing differentiation of national and local interests on both the Greek side and the Turkish side of the border. For example, according to my

interpretative analysis of both *Elefteri Traki* and *Hudut* during the time of the EU membership of Cyprus in May 2004, they both recount old concerns about national security, yet at the same time embrace the new steps taken by local governors for possibilities of EU-funded joint projects. Additionally, they both show a similar kind of indifference to new border crossers, which is, for example, manifested in the daily news article that only gives the head counts of border crossers arrested alive while crossing the border through illegal routes and with an added tone of pity for the ones who died. While I am currently in the field to test these first insights through observations and in-depth interviews, my point that security, economics, and cultural interactions are intermingling during the (re)bordering process has been proven so far.

In sum, my research will show how this intermingling is affected and also has different effects on each of the three dimensions mentioned previously (the discursive borders, cross-border interactions, and the imagined borders), and how the new venues and practices of inclusion/exclusion are redefining the old demarcation lines that used to delineate the notions of nationhood and citizenship in Greece and Turkey. In the light of this first analysis, it can be argued that (1) the discursive borders of interstate relations have been changing from *antagonistic to cooperative*; (2) cross-border interactions on the ground have been turning from *limited to more locally driven ones*; and (3) the imagined borders dividing ‘normal’/insider and ‘threat’/outsider have been shifting from *the historical national other* toward the political ‘outcasts’ and the new ‘transit’ migrants.

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