

Selim YENEL

Blog No: 20
21.08.2020

Global Relations Forum (GRF) (19 August 2020)

Selim YENEL*

Although we live in an era where there has never been so much information available, we still have a hard time getting the facts. Nobody has the patience to sift through all the material and therefore we tend to go to sources that we can trust or seem comfortable with. This may lead us to make different interpretations of events. To be able to understand an interpretation you need to know the facts. Thus, it is imperative to be fully aware of them. Otherwise narrative becomes fact. Whomever produces the first narrative usually gets the upper hand and subsequently it becomes an uphill battle to redress it. At this point one must confess that historically Turkey has had difficulties in correcting these narratives. There are several other reasons for this situation but basically this is also a fact.

The latest example concerns the Eastern Mediterranean. When you read the international press the narrative seems lop sided. It becomes hard to look beyond statements and into what the real situation is. Do we accept everything Greece or Greek Cyprus says at face value? Is there not even a cursory look into their statements? No scrutiny?

For example, Greece for years claimed that Turkish jets violate Greek air space. Actually, when you look into their statistics you would be amazed how the numbers are piling up. There is no doubt of their validity. What should be checked is what does this really mean? NATO and EU authorities should know that Greece claims a 10-mile airspace. It is the only

country in the world that does so, although it is not recognized by anyone.

Both Turkey and Greece are NATO members, and each country claims a six-mile territorial sea in the Aegean. Normally Greek airspace should follow the same pattern and have a breadth of six miles. According to international law, the breadth of national airspace has to correspond to that of the territorial sea. This is clearly reflected in Articles 1 and 2 of the Chicago Convention of 1944 on civil aviation. Thus, all the so-called violations fall within the four-mile difference, which is in fact international air space. Nevertheless, Greece continues to press its claim of violations and this is reported in the press and subsequently its claims become fact. Public opinion has no time or interest to look into the details. Responsible governments should.

Another continuous accusation against Turkey concerns Cyprus. More often than not you would read press reports of a Turkish invasion in 1974 while omitting the coup instigated by Greek colonels who were ruling Greece at the time, to integrate Cyprus with Greece. Fast forward to the claims that after the island was divided the Turkish Cypriots were not interested in a settlement. That assertion was finally laid to rest when there was a referendum in 2004 on both sides of the island and the Cypriot Turks overwhelmingly supported a UN plan for reunification. The Greek Cypriots massively voted against the plan as they could not bear to have equality with their northern neighbours. However, this did not prevent Greek Cyprus from joining the EU. Furthermore, all the promises of the EU to alleviate the isolation of the Turkish Cypriots were blocked by the Greek Cypriots. Numerous efforts and negotiations since then were not successful to solve this question and the U.N. finally gave up.

Soon afterwards, Greek Cyprus started to abuse its EU membership by beginning its hydrocarbon activities in disregard of the rights of the Turkish Cypriots. Its first offshore drilling began in 2011 and continued even throughout the subsequent negotiations which were held under the auspices of the UN. When Greece, Greek Cyprus, Israel, and Egypt joined in this endeavour, it meant not only restricting the rights of the Turkish Cypriots but Turkeys entitlements as well. Thus, Turkey took the steps that are being so superficially criticized. Once again, an uphill struggle to balance the narrative.

All is not well in the Eastern Mediterranean. It is becoming more and more dangerous. The situation becomes even more delicate when other countries take sides. Especially allies. What is also interesting is how EU solidarity seems to trump NATO unity.

The EU should be meticulous in assessing the situation and not accepting claims at face value. The EU should be able to criticize its members if they flout international norms. If the EU can censure Hungary and Poland for infractions relating to the rule of law, why cant it do the same regarding foreign relations? Unless the EU avoids double standards and abides by the standards it itself has set, then it will be difficult for the EU to claim the high ground and be an honest broker.

Trust is essential and as Turkish EU relations continue to deteriorate, adding together unrelated issues only pushes the two sides further away. Soon after accession negotiations were opened with Turkey in 2005 and as the reform process was

accelerating, Turkey was gradually pushed away. In addition to French and German opposition to accession, the membership of Greek Cyprus and its policies alienated Turkey and the integration process suffered. Some other EU members continue to use the situation in Cyprus as an excuse. The aftermath of the coup attempt in the summer of 2016 further exacerbated the relationship and the EU even took an unfortunate decision to stop all dialogue with Turkey. Threats of ending the accession process altogether are being voiced.

Had Turkey been kept in the integration process and as the EU acquis includes UNCLOS (United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea), we might not have faced such a dire situation. It is unfortunate that the EU does not have a long-term vision.

The present state of Turkey EU relations is untenable. Developments in the Eastern Mediterranean are only aggravating the situation. A comprehensive evaluation of all the issues is essential and diplomacy is the only answer. And for diplomacy to work a stable and sustainable dialogue should start. It is high time for the EU to have a closer look into its overall interests and reassess how it has treated Turkey.

* *Ambassador (R) Selim Yenel - Global Relations Forum (GRF), Executive Committee Chairman*

About the author:

To cite this article: Selim YENEL. 2026. "FACTS, INTERPRETATIONS, NARRATIVES - GRF - 19.08.2020." Center For Eurasian Studies (AVİM), Blog No.2020 / 20. August 21. Accessed November 10, 2026. https://mail.avim.org.tr/Blog/FACTS-INTERPRETATIONS-NARRATIVES-GRF-19-08-2020

Süleyman Nazif Sok. No: 12/B Daire 3-4 06550 Çankaya-ANKARA / TÜRKİYE
Tel: +90 (312) 438 50 23-24 • **Fax**: +90 (312) 438 50 26
@avimorgtr
https://www.facebook.com/avrasyaincelemelerimerkezi
E-Posta: info@avim.org.tr
http://avim.org.tr

© 2009-2025 Avrasya İncelemeleri Merkezi (AVİM) Tüm Hakları Saklıdır