

Russia Needs to Prioritize Greece as Relations Rift with Turkey

By [Paul Antonopoulos](#)

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A revealing poll released earlier last week by the highly-reliable [Pew Research Center](#) found that the majority of people in Greece and Turkey viewed NATO unfavourably – the only states of the 16 NATO members surveyed to view the U.S.-led organization in this way. In fact, in the case of Greece, it was one of the very few countries where anti-NATO sentiment was shared by the left and right wings of the political spectrum. An average of 53% of citizens of the 16 surveyed countries had a positive view of NATO with an average of 27% of respondents having a negative view. Favorable positions were extremely high in some countries, such as Poland at 82%, but in Greece 51% of peoples viewed NATO unfavorably while 55% of Turks also did.

From the Greek perspective, they have a history of defying NATO by [supporting the Serbs](#) during the destruction of Yugoslavia and are becoming increasingly frustrated with NATO “ally” Turkey violating its airspace daily and making threats to invade its eastern Aegean islands. From the Turkish perspective, they are frustrated that the U.S. openly supports the Kurdish People’s Protection Units (YPG), a Syrian extension of the Kurdistan Workers Party, that Ankara claims is a terrorist organization.

However, the poll collected its data before the Syrian Army’s latest operation to liberate Idlib province from Turkish-backed jihadists. Rather, the crisis in Idlib has firmly put [Turkey back into NATO’s sphere](#) as the Syrian Army’s offensive has [deepened the rift](#) between Russia and Turkey, so much so that only 16% of Turks trust Russia according to a February 2 poll, a far cry from a [November 2018 INR poll](#) that found 51% of Turks viewed Russia favourably. This also comes as Russian Ambassador to Turkey Alexei Yerkhov [told Zvezda](#) days ago that he constantly receives threats and insults. Some threats include how Turkey “will build skyscrapers from the skulls” of Russia’s military and “Pay the price for every drop of blood” Russia sheds. Anti-Russian sentiment is growing so much in Turkey that Christian graves, including those of Russians, [are being desecrated](#).

As explained in a [previous article](#), a 2013 study found Greece was the only European Union country where favorable views towards Russia prevailed at 63% (33% unfavourable) and views on Russian President Vladimir Putin was positive, at 52% of people. Although this is a significant decrease from the 2013 poll, it does not factor in how the Russian sale of the S-400 to Turkey affected Greek opinions towards Russia and its president. However, a 2018 Pew poll also found that only 36% of Greeks view the U.S. favourably. This demonstrates that Moscow could have a real ally within the NATO bloc where the majority of civilians look at Russia favourably, and one that Moscow should take every advantage of.

The Greek government is still firmly in the Atlanticist camp, but the Greek public are in majority support of Russia. Moscow must take advantage of Greece as it is a rare member of NATO and the European Union where most people are Russophilic. An increased Russian tourist intake into Greece will inevitably increase exchanges between Greek and Russian peoples.

In addition to tourism, Russian businesses must be encouraged to invest in Greece. As Greece is an energy crossroad and also has oil and gas reserves in its maritime space, Russia has immense expertise in these fields and must make active efforts to invest in the country. China, a country with no historical, cultural or religious connections to Greece unlike Russia, has considerably increased its popularity in Greece by assisting in job creation in the economic-stricken country. By providing job opportunities, Russophilia will inevitably increase in Greece.

With Turkey becoming an unreliable partner for Russia, through these soft power approaches, Russia can increase its influence to the Greek people which will inevitably lead into the political sphere. Turkey is much more geostrategic than Greece and Russia invested heavily into improving relations with Ankara through extremely difficult times. The reality is that Russia would find much more success in building flourishing relations with a NATO member by prioritizing relationship building with Greece. This would have the double advantage as Greece, unlike Turkey, is also a European Union member.

Unlike Turkey who defied NATO for self-serving interest in attaining Russian weapons, Greece has defied NATO under pressure from the Greek people who have overwhelming solidarity for Serbia, particularly during the destruction of Yugoslavia.

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Paul Antonopoulos is a Research Fellow at the Center for Syncretic Studies.

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