



# GREECE'S STRATEGIC PRIORITIES IN SEE AND THE BROADER MEDITERRANEAN

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The evolution of Greece's foreign  
policy towards SEE

# SUMMARY

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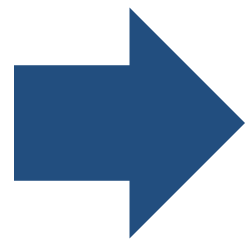
# INTRODUCTION - GREECE'S FOREIGN POLICY

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- **Strategic location of the country** : crossroads of Europe, the Balkans, and the Eastern Mediterranean
- **Complex geopolitical, economic, and security context** in the area, characterized by instability
- **Economic interests** : Southeast Europe offers growing markets and important energy routes linking Greece to the heart of Europe.
- **Diplomatic interest**: Southeast Europe as a space to promote peace and strengthen Greece's role inside the European Union and NATO.
- **Evolution of Greece's approach** since 1989: from defensive nationalism and diplomatic isolation to a proactive and stabilizing role in the 2000s. Impact of the 2008 financial crisis

# I. THE HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS OF GREECE'S FOREIGN POLICY IN SOUTHEAST EUROPE (1989-2008)

**First approach: defensive, based on nationalists sentiments, historical dispute, security-driven perception of the Balkans**

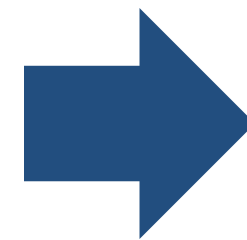


## North Macedonia

Greek dispute with the newly independent Republic of Macedonia. Strong opposition to the name "Republic of Macedonia". Seen as an appropriation of Greek cultural heritage.

1994 - Greece imposed an economic embargo on North Macedonia.

Consequence: increased the tensions in the already fragile region.  
Diplomatic isolation for Greece.



## Serbia

Strong political and economic ties with Serbia during the Yugoslav Wars? . Diplomatic and economic support, in opposition to Western Europe position.

Historical, cultural, and Orthodox Christian heritage.

Tensions between Greece and its Western allies, particularly EU, Serbia seen as responsible for the violent disintegration of Yugoslavia.



# I. THE HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS OF GREECE'S FOREIGN POLICY IN SOUTHEAST EUROPE (1989-2008)

Political shift toward regional engagement and cooperation.

## ➡ 1995 - Interim Agreement with North Macedonia

Lift the embargo; establish a framework for diplomatic dialogue. Mark the beginning of a more pragmatic Greek foreign policy, focused on building stability and economic partnerships in the region.

## ➡ 2003 - Thessaloniki Summit

Shows Greece's strong advocacy for EU enlargement in the Western Balkans. Push for Albania, North Macedonia, Serbia, Montenegro, and Bosnia and Herzegovina eventual integration to the European Union.

Greece positioned itself as a bridge between the EU and the Balkans.



Thessaloniki Summit; Photo: Wikimedia Commons

# I. THE HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS OF GREECE'S FOREIGN POLICY IN SOUTHEAST EUROPE (1989-2008)

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**Political shift toward regional engagement and cooperation.**

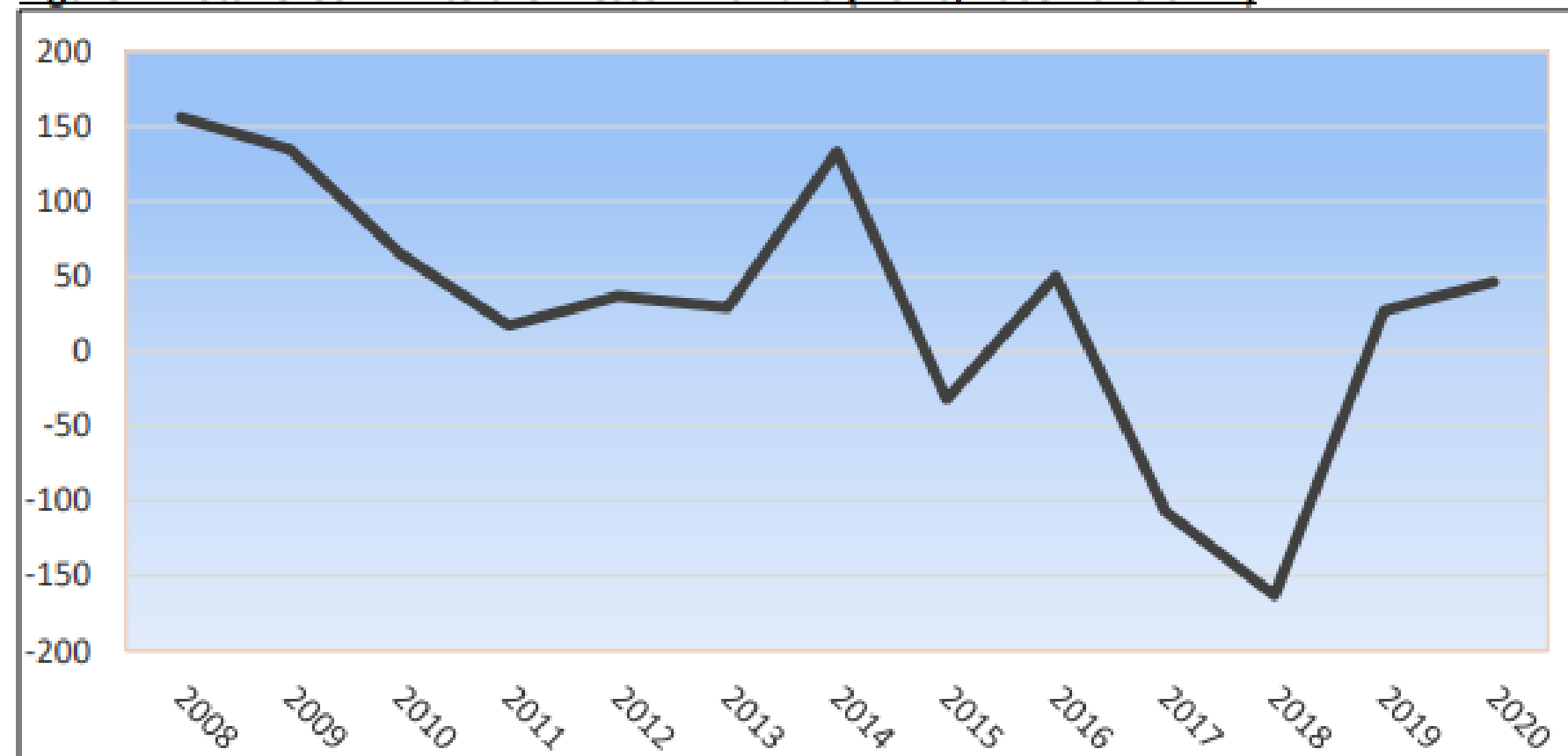
- ➡ **2002 - Hellenic Plan for the Economic Reconstruction of the Balkans (HiPERB)**  
550 million euros: to support infrastructure development, trade, and private sector growth across the region.  
Economic expansion of Greece in the area: Greek banks (Alpha Bank, National Bank of Greece); energy and telecommunications companies.  
Strengthened its economic ties with the Balkans. Increased its soft power and regional influence.
- ➡ **Greece as a supporter of NATO enlargement in the Balkans**  
To help prevent future conflicts and reduce external influences, particularly from Russia. Aim to create a more stable and prosperous neighborhood.

**Transition from a defensive and nationalist stance to a more open and cooperative regional strategy. Greece become a key mediator in regional security discussions.**

# II. THE IMPACT OF THE 2008 FINANCIAL CRISIS: DECLINE AND CHALLENGES (2008-2018)

## Loss of power and influence in the area

Figure 2: Total Greek FDI to the Western Balkans (Flows, 2008-2020 € mn)



Source: Bank of Greece

- ➔ Severe austerity measures: cuts to public spending, widespread privatizations, reductions in diplomatic and development aid programs
- ➔ Between 2009 and 2012, Greek foreign direct investment in the Balkans fell by approximately 165%
- ➔ Greek banks withdrew from markets in Albania, North Macedonia, Serbia, and Bulgaria. Apparition of competitors from Turkey, Austria, and other international actors.
- ➔ Greece no longer seen as an active leader in the EU accession process for Balkans.

# II. THE IMPACT OF THE 2008 FINANCIAL CRISIS: DECLINE AND CHALLENGES (2008-2018)

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## Apparition of other international actors

### TURKEY

Increase of its economic, political, and cultural presence.

Combination of investment, religious diplomacy, and bilateral agreements to strengthen its presence in the region.

Establishment of educational and religious institutions in Albania and Kosovo - cultural diplomacy.

### RUSSIA

Consolidate its presence in Serbia and the Republika Srpska entity of Bosnia and Herzegovina

Energy agreements and political alliances with the countries in the region.

Political support to nationalist and anti-EU movements in Serbia and Bosnia.

### CHINA

Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)

Acquisition of the Port of Piraeus in Greece by the Chinese state-owned company COSCO in 2016

Chinese firms financed major infrastructure projects in Serbia and Montenegro, including highways, railways, and bridges



# III. GREECE'S STRATEGIC REPOSITIONING: FOREIGN POLICY PRIORITIES TODAY (2018-PRESENT)

Greece attempts to increase its lost influence in the area

## ➔ 2018 - Prespa Agreement

Signed between Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras and North Macedonian Prime Minister Zoran Zaev. Establishes the country's new constitutional name as North Macedonia, paving the way for its NATO accession in 2020.

Reaffirms Greece's leadership in the Balkans at a time when competing external actors sought to exploit divisions within the region.

Show to the international community Greece's willingness to take on a proactive role in fostering security and cooperation in Southeast Europe.



# III. GREECE'S STRATEGIC REPOSITIONING: FOREIGN POLICY PRIORITIES TODAY (2018-PRESENT)

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## Energy security as a key pillar of Greece foreign policy

- ➡ **Trans Adriatic Pipeline (TAP)**  
Transports natural gas from Azerbaijan to Europe via Greece. Part of the broader Southern Gas Corridor, which reduces European dependence on Russian energy and enhances Greece's strategic importance in EU energy security
- ➡ **Greece-Bulgaria Interconnector (IGB)**  
To help prevent future conflicts and reduce external influences, particularly from Russia. Aim to create a more stable and prosperous neighborhood.
- ➡ **Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF)**  
Energy partnerships with Egypt, Israel, and Cyprus. Aims to develop and exploit offshore gas reserves in the Eastern Mediterranean.

# III. GREECE'S STRATEGIC REPOSITIONING: FOREIGN POLICY PRIORITIES TODAY (2018-PRESENT)

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## Remaining challenges

### ➡ **Tensions with Turkey**

Disputes over maritime boundaries, airspace violations, and military exercises in the Aegean Sea.

Strategic Defense Agreement between Greece and France: purchase of Rafale fighter jets and Belharra-class frigates to enhance Greece's aerial and naval deterrence capabilities.

Expansion of bilateral defense cooperation with the United States, securing agreements that allow for the expansion of American military facilities in Greece.

### ➡ **Growing influence of Russia in the Balkans**

Close cooperation with NATO in enhancing security measures in Southeast Europe: aims to fight threats such as cyberattacks, disinformation campaigns, and political destabilization efforts by Russian intelligence services.

### ➡ **Migration and border security,**

Frontlines of the EU's efforts to manage irregular migration flows, from conflict zones in the Middle East, Africa, and South Asia.

Issues with the Greek-Turkish border. Significant increase in border security effort: expansion of cooperation with the EU's border agency FRONTEX and construction of fortified barriers along the Greek-Turkish border.

# CONCLUSION

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- Strategic Adaptation: From 1989 to today, Greece's foreign policy has evolved in response to internal crises and external shifts, while maintaining a pro-European orientation.
- Crisis and Repositioning: The 2008 financial crisis weakened Greece's diplomatic influence, prompting a shift toward crisis management and redefined priorities.
- Diplomatic Revival: Since 2018, Greece has pursued a more proactive foreign policy, strengthening strategic alliances and reaffirming its role as a regional leader in the Mediterranean.



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