



THE MILITARY BALANCE BETWEEN GREECE AND TURKEY

Aristos Aristotelous

According to the annual publication "The Military Balance of Greece and Turkey in 2021", of the Cyprus Center for Strategic Studies (CCSS) despite differences in sizes between Greece and Turkey, there appears to be a steady balance of military capabilities in 2021, maintained between the two countries, with great sacrifices, especially on the side of Greece – the highest in Europe. But, of course, this situation is far from allowing Ankara to have decisive numerical superiority and impose itself on the other side.

However, the emphasis of Greek defense budgets, due to heavy pressure from the economy, which is more on the maintenance or modernization of existing capabilities and less on new procurement programs and weapons acquisition, may allow the steadily armored and equipped Turkey to shift the military balance to its favor, especially in terms of naval and air power (with aircraft carriers, corvettes, frigates, helicopters unmanned aerial vehicles, etc.) thus accruing geopolitical advantages and possible economic benefits.

Land Forces (Army): In terms of human resources and main battle tanks, armored vehicles, and other military equipment, there is indeed a Turkish numerical superiority. Still, the ratio differences between the two countries in the various categories are narrower and more favorable for Greece than before.

In the Navy, the comparison of forces with Turkey is even more favorable for the Greek defense, in heavy naval means such as submarines (11 Greek and 12 Turkish) and frigates (13 Greek and 16 Turkish) constituting powerful capabilities to meet credibly any Turkish challenge in Aegean. However, numerically more minor than the Turkish ones, the rest of the warships are nevertheless a significant force for the Greek Navy that the other side cannot ignore.

In the Air Force, Greece, with 230 fighter jets – 78 less than Turkey – maintains a force ratio of 1,3 Turkish fighters for each Greek, which will improve further with the supply of French Rafale. And although modernization, significant

Dr Aristos Aristotelous is an ex – Member of Parliament, Director of the Cyprus Centre for Strategic Studies, and Member of the Board of the Cyprus Center for European and International Affairs.

technological upgrades, and numerical increase of all available means in this field are required, the Air Force is a very strong, reliable, and decisive element in defense of Greek national sovereignty. The same goes for Turkey.

An advantage for Greece is the high percentage of professionals in the Armed Forces (52% in the Army, 88% in the Navy, compared to 23% and 29% respectively in Turkey). Other advantages are the high degree of coherence between the Armed Forces, a clear perception of the type and origin of the threat, and the level of training, especially in the Navy and the Airforce. The problem is the burdened economy and the constraints it imposes on defense, the smaller size of the country in general, the tremendous technological requirement for forming a modern armed force to cope with the geographical challenges to the East and put forward an effective defense.

For Turkey, its advantage is the more significant numbers and its size, the depth of the domestic war industry that makes it self-sufficient in various sectors, and its emergence as a notable weapons exporter. On the other hand, a severe problem for Turkey is the multiple threats it faces at home and its periphery. Also, its involvement in various crises abroad requires considerable logistics and administration support from its Armed Forces to be maintained. Furthermore, Turkey is weakened by the continuous purges of the ranks of officers, fearing a coup and the uneasy relations with the USA, the EU, and other countries in the region.

In Cyprus, on the other hand, there is a substantial Turkish military superiority that Turkey is using to keep the northern part of the Republic since the island's invasion in 1974 under occupation and exercise control and political influence on the fate of the country and developments in the region.

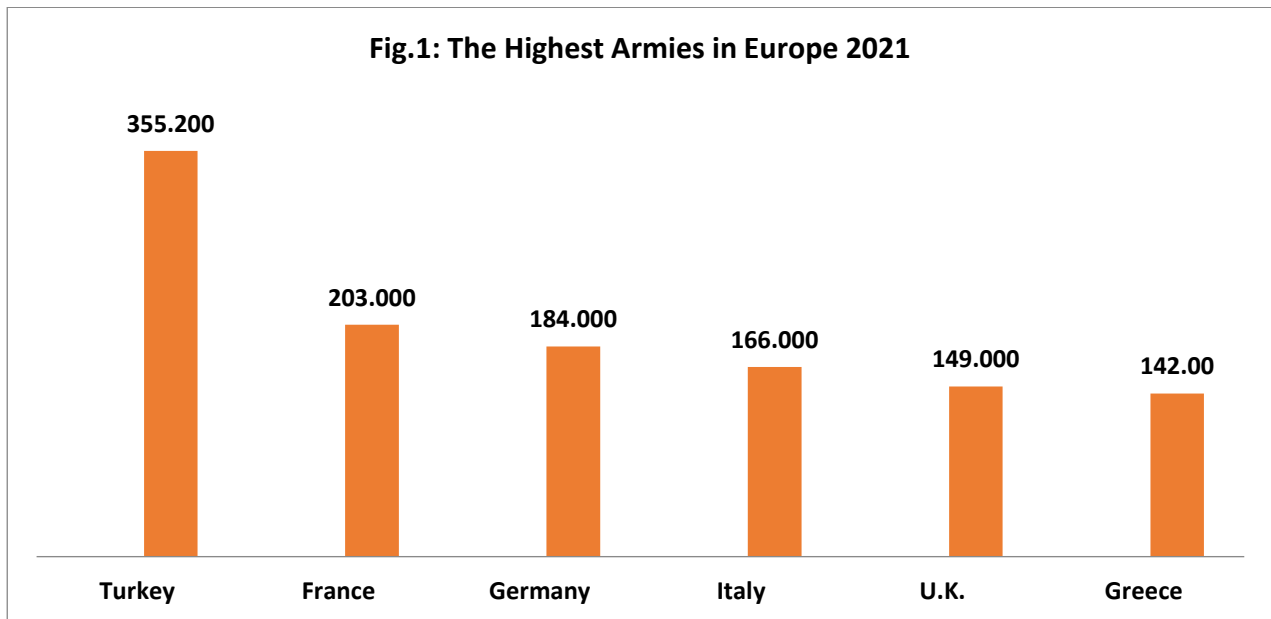
Comparison of Military Data

The above conclusions derive from the analysis of relevant military data drawn from open sources (SIPRI, IISS, OSCE, NATO, CIA, World Bank, etc.) and unclassified data in possession by the CCSS, some critical aspects of which we present here below:

The population of Greece amounts to 10.761.253 and in Turkey to 82.017.514.

The active total military personnel on the Greek side amounts to 142.700 and on the Turkish side to 355.200, the highest number in Europe. (Fig.1)

In other words, there are 2,4 Turkish soldiers for every Greek compared to 3,5:1 in 2014.



Land Forces (The Army)

Military Personnel: In Greece, it amounts to 93.500 in Turkey to 260.200, e.g., 2,7 Turkish soldiers for every 1 Greek. However, 52% of those serving in the Greek Army are professionals, while it is 23% in Turkey.

Main Battle Tanks: Greece has 1.328 tanks and Turkey 2.378 (1,7 Turkish tanks for every Greek).

Armored Personnel Vehicles: Greece 2.130 TOMP's and Turkey 3.632, e.g., 1,7 Turkish for every 1 Greek.

Armored Combat Vehicles: Greece 169, Turkey 645.

Reconnaissance Armored Vehicles: Greece 242, Turkey 250.

Artillery: On the Greek side, there are 3.518 different types of guns (mortars, rocket launchers, trailers, and others), and on the Turkish side, 7.833.

Anti-tank: (self-propelled and portable). Greece has 1.136 units and Turkey 1.363.

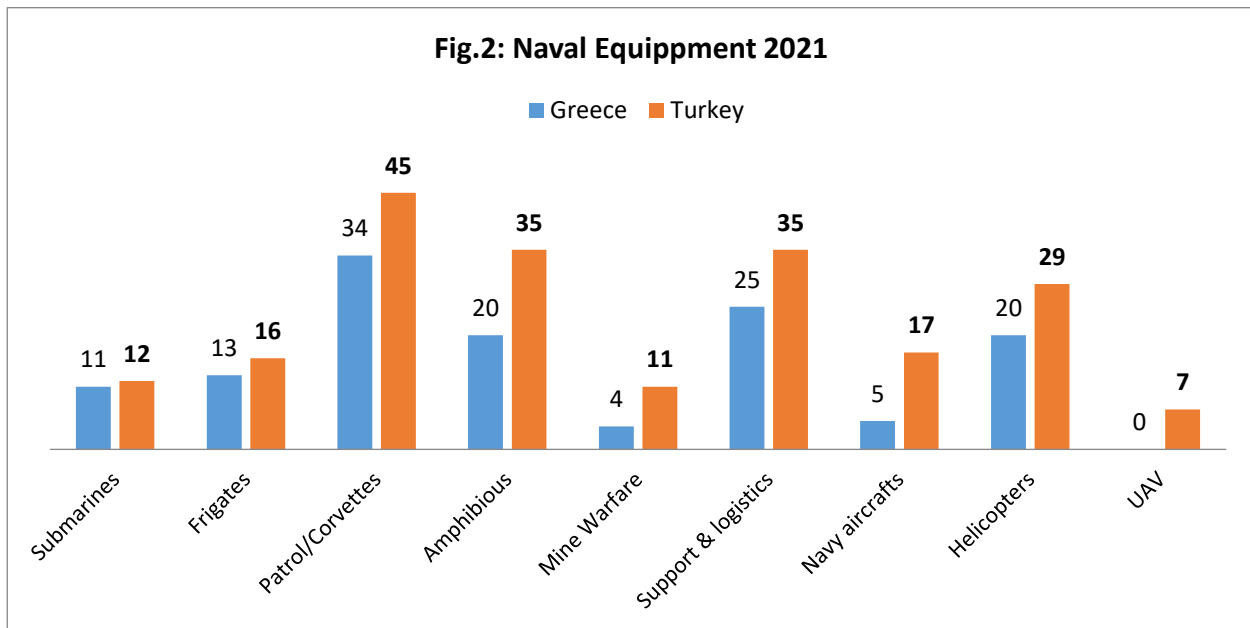
Army aircraft: Greece 18, Turkey 49, plus 45 training.

Army helicopters: Greece has 28 offensive and 139 transport and Turkey 89 offensive, 28 multiple missions, and 227 transport.

Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs or Drones): Greece has eight old UAV SAGEM Sperwer IDs in the Army. Turkey has 133 UAVs of various intelligence gathering missions, of which 33 with offensive capabilities, made in Turkey.

Air Defense: Greece has 1.341 Ground-to-Ground and TOWED anti-aircraft means and Turkey 1.540 plus the two S-400 arrays stationed near Ankara.

The Navy (Fig.2)



In Greece, the naval personnel is 16.000, and in Turkey, 45.000.

Submarines: Greece 11 and Turkey 12 of German origin, mainly old type.

Frigates: Greece 13 frigates (NLD Kortenaer and GER MEKO 200) and Turkey 19 (GER MEKO-200 & T.N. and US Perry Class).

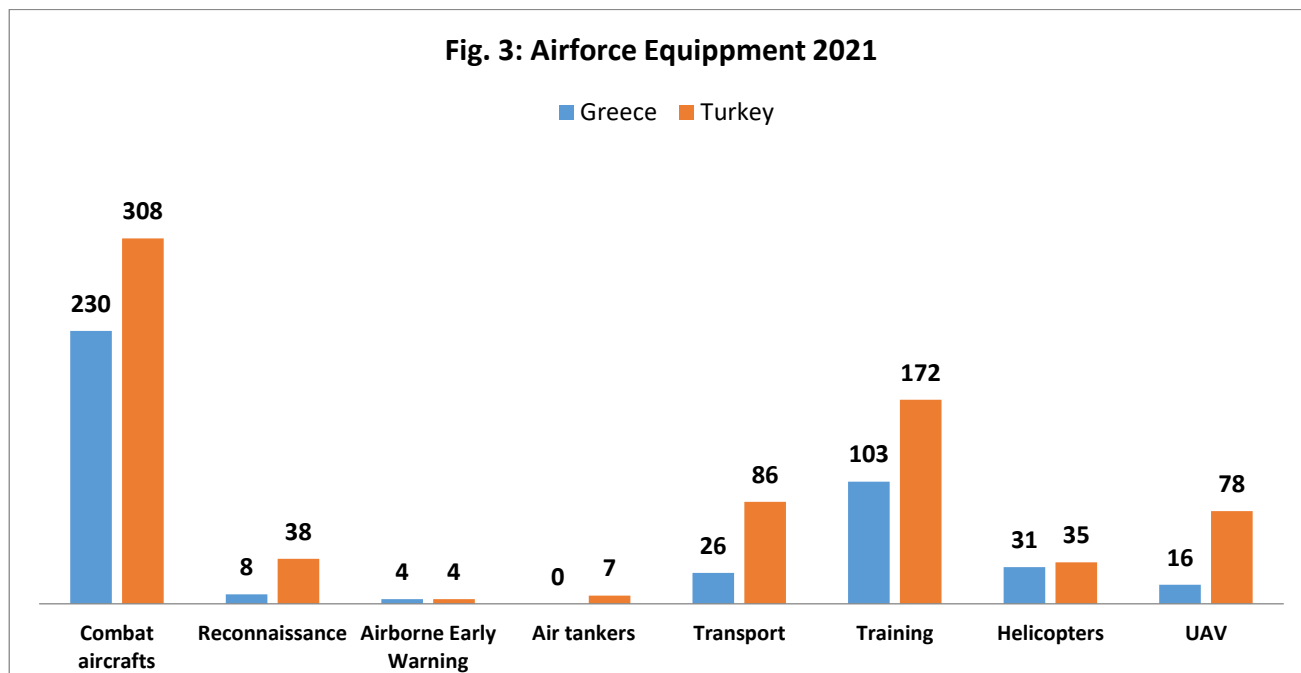
Patrols, Amphibious, Support Ships, and other means: Greece has 34 patrols and 20 amphibious (5 ships), and 25 support vessels of various types. Respectively, Turkey has ten corvettes, 35 patrols, 35 landing craft (5 boats), and 35 support vessels of different types.

Greece has 5 P-C Orion **anti-submarine aircraft** (4 under modernization). In Turkey, 17 anti-submarine aircraft, of which 10 are patrol (police) and seven light transport. Greece also has 20 **helicopters** (18 anti-submarine and two reusable) and Turkey 29 offensive.

UAV: The Turkish Navy has 3 ANKA-S and 4 Bayraktar TB2 (Turkish Drones) capabilities for strategic and regular intelligence gathering, surveillance, and targeting missions. Further, Turkey is strengthening its Fleet with Bayraktar TB3 to consolidate the doctrine of the "blue homeland."

Airforce (Fig.3)

Human Resources: Greece 21.600, n Turkey 50.000.



The Fighter Aircraft of the Greek side amount to 230 and in Turkey 308. Therefore, the expulsions of Turkey from the F-35 project by the USA was a significant setback to its modernization program.

Reconnaissance Aircraft: Greece 8, Turkey 38.

Early Warning Aircraft: Greece 4 (EMB-145 AMB-145AEW), Turkey 4 (B-737 AEW).

Transport Aircraft and Helicopters: Greece has 23 C-160, Hercules and Spartan (plus three light Transport aircraft), and 31 light and medium type helicopters. Turkey has 89 C-27 transport, Hercules and Spartan, and 35 helicopters.

Flying Refueling Aircraft: The Turkish Air Force has seven such aircraft and not Greece at all.

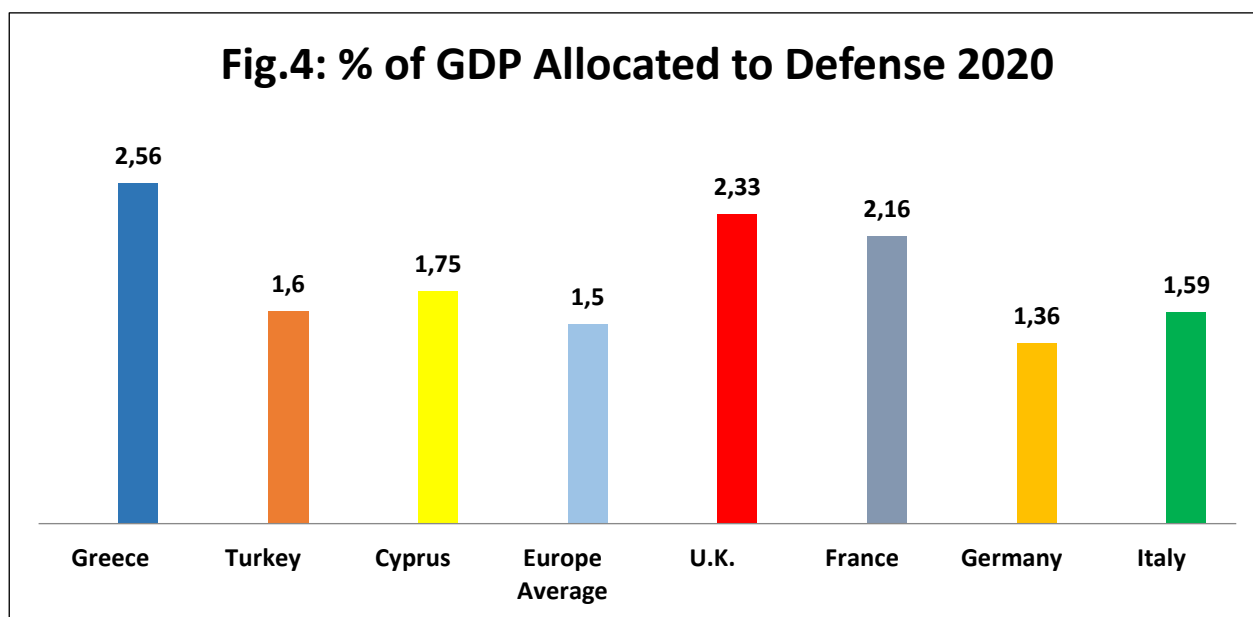
Air Defense: Greece has American Patriots and Russian S-300 PMU-1. Turkey has the MIM-23 Hawk MIM-Nike Hercules and Russian S-400s.

Cyprus

The Republic of Cyprus maintains a National Guard of approximately 10.000 soldiers facing a 36.000 Turkish occupation force. Also, it has no actual naval or Air force capabilities to oppose Turkey's tremendous sea and air superiority (only 70 kilometers away) except for a few patrol crafts and an insignificant number of helicopters for anti-tank purposes and S&R operations.

Defense Expenditure

The defense sector continues to absorb significant national resources in the two countries. Given its economic problems, Greece feels particularly burdened in this field. Greece in 2020 allocated \$ 4,9 billion for its defense, and Turkey more than doubled (\$ 11 billion), mainly due to different requirements and sizes of their Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Cyprus spent \$406m. The higher spender on defense in Europe is the UK (\$ 61,5 billion).



However, for Greece, which faces several threats and challenges from Turkey, the economic sacrifice from the 1970s to the present is more significant burden than any other European country. And while the average defense spending on GDP in Europe in 2020 was 1,50%, Greece allocated 2,56% of its GDP for this purpose, Turkey 1,6 %, and Cyprus 1,75% (Fig.4).