

AND WHEN THE SULTAN GOES MARCHIN' IN....

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It is still unclear how exactly the Erdogan visit to Athens on 7-8 December was arranged. Some reports claimed the Turkish president “invited himself” and the Tsipras government simply went along. Other news stories spoke of “meticulous” Greek diplomatic preparation as part of an effort to “clarify” Greek-Turkish relations at a time of heightened regional tensions, Erdogan’s daily verbal sniping at European governments, and deteriorating relations with the United States.

Irrespective of the mechanics of the first visit to Greece by a Turkish president in 65 years, opinions about the wisdom of the visit were divided. Tsipras supporters saw the visit as a smart diplomatic initiative; those less enthusiastic either dismissed the planned trip as a perfect opportunity for Erdogan to fire his usual verbal darts at the Greeks or cautioned the timing of the visit was unfavorable given Turkey’s developing Islamic metamorphosis and Erdogan’s hostile and provocative rhetoric.

Those paying closer attention to preparations for Erdogan’s landing in Athens noticed the unusually intrusive Turkish security tactics being carried out on Greek soil with the Tsipras government a simple spectator.

Erdogan’s advanced team compared favorably to those who pave the way for visits by a US president. A fleet of polished black limousines and SUVs landed ahead of the arrival of the Turkish presidential couple. Erdogan’s security sent a reported 200 Turkish police and security

agents to Athens; few doubted this contingent came armed to the teeth, especially since Erdogan sees Gulenist conspirators around every corner waiting to threaten his wellbeing.

When the presidential airplane landed at the Athens international airport, and with the Greek welcoming delegation waiting and smiling (uncomfortably) at the foot of the ladder, Turkish security agents kept unloading baggage from the front door of the aircraft for several minutes apparently undisturbed by this blatant breach of protocol. The Erdogans finally appeared at the door after a whole retinue of helpers and others had exited the aircraft. As soon as the presidential couple went through the welcoming formalities, the Turkish president and his spouse boarded an imposing bulletproof limousine surrounded by Turkish agents ala US president in tight “diamond formation.” The long Turkish vehicle convoy departed with only three Greek vehicles trailing -- an ambulance, a police patrol car, and an unmarked police vehicle (see [video](#) - Greek national TV.)

Erdogan’s provocative arrival at the airport set the tone for the rest of the visit whose twists and turns have been reported extensively (see, for example, [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#).) As it was predicted by the skeptics, the budding sultan used the opportunity to fire broadsides at his hosts in front of the cameras. His pièce de résistance was his demand for the Lausanne Treaty to be “updated” -- a novel term calling essentially for the abrogation of treaty terms which, according to the Turkish president, unduly constrict the greatness of Turkey and prevent her from, for example, dominating the whole of the Aegean and claiming as her own many uninhabited islets which the treaty recognizes as Greek territory.

The two-day visit that included Erdogan visiting the Moslems of Greek Thrace shaped into an aggressive PR operation by the Turkish president, who, no doubt, had also in mind the European audiences; his potshots at the Greeks were also potshots at the European Union, which keeps narrowing the playing field for Turkey’s European aspirations now that Erdogan is openly hostile to the “infidels” disapproving of his authoritarian Islamic experiments at home.

At the end of every state visit there is always a profit-and-loss statement by both sides. The Greek statement regarding the Erdogan visit was heavier on the loss side. The budding sultan comfortably dominated the proceedings. A veteran of putting up “big power” shows to demand the rest of the world pays proper respects to Turkey’s greatness, Erdogan, the

international statesman, had little trouble piling up the points sitting next to a visibly uncomfortable Greek president and the permanently tie-less Greek PM, who presides over a cabinet resembling a collection of open-shirted high school juveniles and throwbacks to the leftist protest years of the 1960s hauling backpacks and sporting pony tails.

Erdogan brushed aside Greek “concerns” as, for example, regarding almost daily Turkish violations of Greek sovereign airspace, and suggested to his Greek audience to set aside the past, and the history of destruction of the Asia Minor Greeks, in favor of a “promising future” which, according to his interpretation, obviously includes the recognition and respect of Turkey’s “legitimate” interests in the Aegean.

The only unconfirmed positive of the Erdogan visit is a [press claim](#) that the visit came to a “secret agreement” to combat illegal immigration that continues to pour the uninvited upon the Greek islands closest to the Anatolian coast. It remains to be seen how exactly this purported Erdogan-Tsipras pact will impact the illegal immigration invasion of Greece which has reached a critical stage. With Hellas’s northern border hermetically sealed with blessings from Brussels, and a European “resettlement” plan, aiming to distribute asylees across the EU a total failure, Greece, already the unwilling collection pool of the uninvited, desperately needs Turkish help in stemming the flow of the illegals (or ‘irregulars’) that threatens to destabilize her large islands.

The dithyrambs showered upon Erdogan back home confirmed the success of his manipulating the Greek visit to ramp up popular approval for his “great power” antics. In supposedly speaking to his Greek hosts, the Turkish strongman addressed his power base at home seeking to boost morale and show his opponents he is the absolute master of the game. At a time when Turkey is rapidly approaching pariah status in the eyes of the West, and is subject to deft manipulations by President Putin and the Iranians, the Greek state visit served to salve some of Turkey’s image wounds.

As for the incumbent Greek government, Erdogan’s sojourn served as a convenient boost of the fantasies, peddled by Tsipras et.al., about Greece’s relevance as a “big league player” in things European. PM Tsipras has an established record of hollow boasting in this respect -- and the aftermath of the Erdogan visit is living proof of how Greece continues to see mirages as “concrete success” and act irresponsibly on vital strategic questions.

