

BIO-DIPLOMACY AND THE BIO-ENVIRONMENT

His Excellency the Ambassador of Turkey

[Mr. Gunduz Aktan](#)

Embassy of Turkey in Greece

As is known, we have undertaken many common cooperative efforts in the recent past in order to improve the relations between our two countries. During Greece's somewhat long electoral period, these efforts understandably slowed down. We believe it is high time that we set ourselves back on the path of mutual cooperation. It is, I think, exceptionally meaningful that we start with this symposium on Biopolitics. I always felt I was lucky to have dealt with environmental questions right from the beginning of my career. When I met Dr. Vlavianos-Arvanitis, I understood that the bios concept, being superior, reflects and encompasses reality to a greater extent than any of its closest rivals. I believe that we should reassess all our thinking, values, attitudes and policies in light of the concept of life, or bios.

Turkey, like Greece and other countries for that matter, faces serious problems besetting the preservation of bios. Rapid population growth and an extremely high rate of urbanisation have played havoc with the natural environment. In my generation, urban centres like Istanbul, Athens and Ankara have tripled or quadrupled in population and space. This has created infrastructure problems ranging from housing through traffic to transportation and communication. This, combined with a very high rate of industrialisation, has polluted the city's air, soil and water resources. Fertile, arable land has been deeply encroached upon by industrial sites and perhaps lost for good. Construction technology spurred by greed for profit has destroyed the traditional fabric of old towns and the beauty of the landscape. Both Turkey and Greece suffer not only from their own environmental problems, but also from the adverse effects of transboundary pollution. Pernicious, though not always visible, effects of the environmental degradation on individual lives come into the open as psychosomatic diseases. The longevity average increases together with increased health hazards, like the radiation loaded clouds after the Chernobyl accident. The dumping of highly toxic chemical waste into the Aegean and the Black Sea turned into a nightmare. Conditions beyond our control, like climatic change and the consequent water shortages, threaten our countries and are potentially catastrophic for our regions.

The list is not exhaustive, neither do I want to prolong it. But in the present state of affairs the threat to bios is real and serious. Halfway measures, palliatives or expediciencies do not constitute a response to them. Tactical and short-term moves are irrelevant. Therefore, I, as a modest diplomat who has been brought up with these weaknesses, am evidently misplaced to talk about their solution, let alone to make recommendations. I am of the opinion that those of us concerned with bios have very little to learn from diplomacy and indeed, the reverse is true. In the past, when we exaggerated our daily problems, the sages used to advise us to look into the infinite skies in order to have a sense of proportion. Now, what is called for is much simpler—we should look around us and see the imminence and the magnitude of the danger, in view of which the dimensions of all real and fictitious problems are reduced to the extent of the ludicrous. Another, perhaps equally sobering lesson we can take from the concept of bios is a profoundly humane understanding that no matter what divides us and how divided we are, we share a common destiny—that we are in the same rocking boat. An ancient poet once said that death was the ultimate equalising force, for it struck with the same majesty the rich and the poor. Now in life, threats to bios deal equal blows not only to rich and poor, but to all, irrespective of race, colour, religion and nation. Dangers to bios may well bring about what the admonitions of religions have failed to do, namely the brotherhood of mankind. The crucial point that bio-morals can teach to diplomacy is that in this game there can be no winners of no losers. Either we will win together or we will lose together. It is no more than a chess board on which we are operating. Cooperation, a long-term, far-sighted, honest and altruistic cooperation, is the name of the game. Can we play it or is it too late for us to change our ways? This question should have a positive answer.

In conclusion, I state that I will humbly listen to the eminent experts who will follow me in this symposium to see what will have to be said in response to the challenge of bios and the potential of cooperation between our two nations.

References

1. Aktan, G., (1990) "Bio-Diplomacy and the Bio-Environment", pp. 15-18 in Biopolitics, The Bio-Environment and International Cooperation (A. Vlavianos-Arvanitis, Ed.). Biopolitics International Organisation, Athens, Greece.

His Excellency Mr. **Gunduz Aktan** graduated from the Faculty of Political Sciences of Ankara University and served at the Turkish Ministries of the Interior and Foreign Affairs. He has served at the Turkish Delegation to the OECD (Paris), the Turkish Embassy in Nairobi and the Turkish permanent mission to the United Nations. Mr. Aktan worked at the United Nations headquarters as director for the north-south dialogue and directed the Gulf Department and the Department of International Economic Organisations of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He was posted as first counsellor of the Turkish Embassy in Berne, returned to Turkey to be Advisor to the Prime Minister for foreign affairs and, while continuing to serve as Advisor, was appointed as director general of multilateral economic relations at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, responsible also for Turkey's relations with the EC. Presently, he is Turkey's Ambassador to Greece.