**Memorandum of Conversation**

Brussels, December 11, 1974, 11 a.m.

**PARTICIPANTS**

* ***US***
* The Secretary
* Arthur Hartman, Assistant Secretary for European Affairs
* Ambassador Kubisch
* Nelson Ledsky (notetaker)
* ***Greek***
* Foreign Minister Bitsios
* Mr. E. Stoforopoulas, Chef du Cabinet to Foreign Minister Bitsios

**SUBJECT**

* Memorandum of Conversation: The Secretary’s Meeting with Greek Foreign
* Minister Bitsios

Meeting began with a five minute picture taking session with newsmen.

The Secretary: Having your picture taken with me may ruin you in Greece.

Bitsios: That’s all right. I am very glad to see you again. I am also glad to see Ambassador Kubisch. We are looking forward to having him back in Athens and I want you to know we have very much appreciated his courtesy and abilities in dealing with our problems. (Smiling) Perhaps you should let him remain in Greece and not call him back to Washington where some misunderstanding has arisen.

The Secretary: We have sent you one of our very best. He has my total confidence and in addition is a personal friend. I understand, however, that you need 2,000 police to protect him there.

Bitsios: Oh, no. There was some kind of big demonstration…

The Secretary: Do you think I would draw a crowd if I arrived in Athens now?

Bitsios: I would hope you would draw a cheering crowd when you come. We want to find a formula that would enable that to happen. I don’t regard that as an impossibility, or even overly difficult task. In the last several weeks we have settled a great number of our previous political problems.

The Secretary: I want to say at the outset that we were delighted by the outcome of the recent Greek elections. The results have given your Prime Minister a relatively free hand.

Bitsios: You must understand, of course, that the new Government has inherited a great number of problems from the previous regime.

The Secretary: I hope it is understood in Athens that I am a great admirer of Caramanlis. I am really delighted with recent developments in Athens. We want Caramanlis to succeed very much in the important work he has undertaken.

Bitsios: I appreciate those remarks, but I want you to understand that we not only have pressing political problems, but great economic difficulties as well.

The Secretary: We are prepared to be of any help that we can in this area.

Bitsios: Thank you very much.

The Secretary: I am not sure what we can do in the economic area, but in principle we are prepared to be helpful. I am sure we can get congressional support.

Bitsios: Within the past year we have, like most countries, suffered from the marked increase in petroleum prices. This has cost us some absolutely wrecked our tourist season, and cost us countless millions in revenue.

The Secretary: Have we had any detailed discussions with you on economic questions?

Hartman: No.

The Secretary: What I want you to know is that we want Caramanlis to succeed very much. We are disposed to be helpful. Any program undertaken in the economic field should in my judgment be on a substantial enough scale to succeed. You can, if you wish, make an approach through Ambassador Kubisch at any time.

Bitsios: Thank you very much for these remarks. I shall pass them to the Prime Minister.

What is really encouraging is that we are beginning to see the outlines of our political questions in clearer focus. We settled our main domestic problems with the elections. We have now met with the Cypriots, and have obtained their full views. These are not, I might add, very much different from the description I gave you in Rome in early November. Roughly speaking, there is now agreement on common lines for a Cyprus solution. There must be a federal system which provides for a main Turkish area around Kyrenia and a smaller number of Turkish cantons.

The Secretary: Let me halt you here, so that we can be somewhat more precise. All of the Turkish areas would be in the north?

Bitsios: Yes, the main area would be in the north as would the smaller Turkish cantons. (Bitsios then produced a map with the proposed Turkish areas marked on it.)

The Secretary: Has Makarios accepted this kind of a geographic division.

Bitsios: Yes, he is prepared to accept it. The Turks would get a federated system on a geographic basis. That is what they have been requesting.

The Secretary: It is, of course, not decisive what it is called.

Bitsios: There are a number of advantages to this kind of solution. The number of displaced persons would be relatively small. The Turks would have concentrations of their population in the areas they desire. The lines could be negotiated, but the Turkish territory would have to be closer to the general population percentage on the island. That means closer to a 80–20 split. There is also the fact, which I didn’t appreciate in Rome, about the management problems the Turks have had in running their area of Cyprus. With this kind of division, they should be able to manage their territory without jeopardizing the general economic life of the island.

The Prime Minister wanted me to tell you that we are ready to move for a breakthrough now. We want to start negotiations in Nicosia as soon as possible. This is the time to act—this moment must not be lost.

The Secretary: I agree completely.

Bitsios: Secondly, the Prime Minister wanted me to assure you that there is broad acceptance in the Greek community of a federated solution. The Prime Minister also wanted me to indicate to you that if you did not get good results from your discussions with Esenbel here in Brussels, he would welcome your traveling to Ankara in the very nearest future. It is our view that you could have some personal success as well out of such a visit. We have confided to you and only to you on this matter. We are convinced that if the negotiations can be started, many of the problems in other political areas can be quickly solved.

The Secretary: Before commenting in detail on your presentation, let me explain some of my own problems. First on the domestic side. The question of an aid cut off does not primarily involve Turkey, but goes to the question of executive authority over the conduct of foreign relations. If we permit Congress to dictate the tactics to be employed in foreign policy, we will lose control. It is for this reason we cannot yield. In our negotiations with the Soviets for example, we are exchanging aide-mémoires every day. We cannot have a situation, however, where congressional committees call up our bureaucrats and demand to know what our negotiating tactics are. I know that no Greek Government can support us on the question of aid to Turkey, and I would not ask for such support. As for a possible visit to Ankara, you will appreciate that I cannot go following these NATO meetings. There are scheduled meetings with the French in Martinique. I could perhaps, if the situation warrants, go to Ankara in early January.

Bitsios: Do you think there is any prospect of making a breakthrough here?

The Secretary: Let’s define that a little more clearly. I tried out with the Turks the idea of a large Turkish area in the north and some smaller Turkish cantons in the south. The Turks were adamantly opposed. It is my impression that this is a weak Turkish Government, and a relatively unimaginative foreign minister who is not empowered to make decisions here in Brussels.

At some future point it may therefore be necessary to go to Ankara. At that moment, the threat of an aid cut off could be helpful to my negotiating position. My intention is to talk to Congress about this next week when I return. My objective would not be to get an obligatory aid cut off, but to have the flexibility to use such a cut off as a threat.

I am very pleased to hear your position as you outlined it. Your feeling that the negotiations should start quickly and that you can accept some form of geographic federation are positive elements.

Bitsios: Okay. We should of course avoid getting involved in semantics over what an acceptable geographic federation is.

The Secretary: I agree, but I got the impression this morning from my talks with the Turks that they might be willing to pay something in concrete terms for some acceptable language on geographic federalism.

Where is Stabler?

Hartman: In view of the numbers here, Wells stayed back.

The Secretary: I have discovered it always takes five Americans to conduct these conversations. (To Bitsios)—That reminds me have you read the novel called ***The Greeks***? It presents a scary picture.

Bitsios: I hope you have read more about Greece than that single book. If not, I’m going to start sending you a whole collection of reading material.

The Secretary: No, I have read much more. As you know, I have been interested primarily in two periods. Classical Greece, and the period around the war for independence. Those are the periods on which I have focused my interest.

Let’s go back to the negotiating process. I think the idea of Turkish gesture which we talked about in October and November is no longer important. What we need now is to get the negotiating process started.

Bitsios: Once negotiations start, they will have a momentum of their own.

(Humming noise heard in room.)

The Secretary: What was that?

Hartman: The wind.

The Secretary: I can assure you that we have no recording system here. If there is one, it’s strictly Belgian.

Let’s go back to the question of how we get the negotiations started. When I saw Mavros in New York in October,[4](https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v30/d155#fn:1.5.4.4.12.284.114.4) he was concerned about the powers of the federal state. Perhaps the negotiations could begin by discussing two basic issues: (A) alleviation of the conditions of suffering on the island (B) the nature of the federal governmental structure. It seems to me that the stronger the federal structure can be, the less fear your side will have of partition as an eventual solution. There is, of course, the question of who should conduct the negotiations. The Turkish side says it doesn’t know whom to negotiate with.

Bitsios: That should be obvious. It’s Clerides. Clerides was so designated in the communiqué.

The Secretary: Good. We strongly prefer him. There is also a second question. I have no desire to become the fall guy for this entire operation. You know the outcome on Cyprus will not be brilliant. I have never been eager to get in the middle of the negotiations.

Bitsios: I see no reason why you should get yourself in the middle. Once the talks begin between the two sides, they will have a momentum of their own.

The Secretary: What should I do now?

Bitsios: What we need to know is whether the Turks want to negotiate or not.

The Secretary: I can get you an answer on that. One thing I can assure you, the U.S. will use its influence to produce negotiations.

Bitsios: But that is not the real question. The real question is do the Turks wish to negotiate or are they simply playing for time? We have studied the recent statements by Esenbel, and were amused by suggestions that Ankara is leaving a decision about negotiation to Denktash. Everyone knows Denktash decides nothing. Why would they wish to delay? Either to solidify their position on the island, or simply to mark time to see what happens with Makarios.

The Secretary: Probably both.

Bitsios: We have been encouraged by a report we saw from Nicosia in which Ambassador Crawford indicated that the Turks may eventually be preparing to accept some kind of cantonal solution.

The Secretary: I think there is no basis for this. I’ve seen no such report.[5](https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v30/d155#fn:1.5.4.4.12.284.134.2) It could happen, of course. I don’t exclude anything, but I see no basis for any such conclusion.

Bitsios: Knowing the Turks had such a thought in the back of their mind would help us in moving forward.

The Secretary: I can tell you from today’s conversations, that the Turks are absolutely firm. They may have been a shade, but only a shade, less passionate in describing their position than previously. The Foreign Minister I saw today seemed weak and not excessively imaginative. My own view is we should not get bogged down in discussing cantonal solutions or bi-zonalism, but move to complete as much of the negotiations as we can and then the geographic arrangement may fall more naturally into place. I can assure you of this: that we will bring pressure to bear on Turkey for a solution better than the present status quo. We are also strongly in favor of early talks.

The real question is how to get negotiations started. We had talked earlier of Turkish gestures. Whatever these gestures would have been, you would have had to say they were unsatisfactory. So I am prepared to turn away from this approach. Let’s get the talks started. We can talk about the airport, ports, and perhaps a few other things such as troop withdrawals, perhaps in return for stating the principle of geographic federation. Turkey has indicated it wishes to wait for December Makarios provides a signed mandate to Clerides. As for the United States, I see no reason to press for an announcement here in Brussels.

I intend to see Esenbel this afternoon and I could put the following points to him: (1) The Greek Government wishes these negotiations conducted through Clerides, who it will back against Makarios. If a disagreement arises between Makarios and Clerides, both the United States and the Greek Government will support the latter. The first subjects to be discussed in a negotiation would be (a) the powers of the Federal Government and (b) relief for the civilian population on the island. Once agreement is reached on these subjects, the negotiations can proceed to other issues.

If I cannot bring about an agreement along these lines here in Brussels, I would be prepared to go to Ankara soon.

Bitsios: I agree. We can discuss the powers of the Federal Government. This is a point where we could begin, but I think you must understand that fairly soon we would have to come to a discussion of territorial arrangements.

The Secretary: It is a pity that Ecevit is still not in power in Turkey. Esenbel is simply not of the same caliber. He is too rigid and unimaginative.

Hartman: The Turks, you must understand, however, have a natural aversion to Makarios.

Bitsios: Turkey holds the key to US/Greek relations. It also holds the key to Greek/NATO relations. You may say that you are giving aid to Turkey for alliance purposes, but the Greek public reads these statements and notes that Turkey uses United States equipment on Cyprus and may be prepared to use it at a later date against Greece itself. We understand the positions you have taken publicly. We appreciate your need to maintain this line, and if you can get a negotiation process started on Cyprus, we will work for Greece/Turkey détente in other areas.

The Secretary: I have to say that Prime Minister Caramanlis has handled anti-Americanism in Greece magnificently. He has maneuvered with great skill. It is clearly in his interests to have the Cyprus problem settled as quickly as possible so it does not hang over his head. We will support an early solution.

We must at the same time say frankly that these threats to withdraw from NATO or to undermine the United States/Greek bilateral relationship cannot be accepted quietly. We must state our opposition openly.

Bitsios: The actions we have taken in these areas have been forced upon us by public opinion. There are no threats involved, and we have carefully refrained from being provocative or moving precipitously.

The Secretary: All right. To return to Cyprus. Let me see what we can do. You are no longer haggling about gestures. That is very helpful. Let me talk to Esenbel this afternoon. Then, Art, I am afraid, you may have to go to Ankara.

Hartman to Bitsios: Do you think Clerides can work out a satisfactory working arrangement with Makarios?

Bitsios: I think so. They will get along. I don’t believe they will have a falling out.

The Secretary: The attitude of Caramanlis which you have outlined this morning is most statesman-like. Frankly I was going to tell you this morning that I would do nothing more and that I saw no basis for making progress here in Brussels. This was based also on the position you have taken on NATO and bilateral issues.

Bitsios: Surely Ambassador Kubisch here has told you how we are considering NATO and other bilateral security issues. Yesterday we delivered a new letter about US bases. I can assure you there is no pressure intended. We have issued no threats. We spent hours, in fact, in formulating the note delivered yesterday in Washington, and we would not have spent the time if we did not recognize the importance of proceeding in a manner so as to preserve the US/Greek relationship.

The Secretary: You must understand our problem. In the United States we have a threat to the central authority which we must resist.  It happens that the Turkish aid question has come up first. We have decided to take on the Congress whenever it wishes to intrude on the issue of foreign policy tactics. This has importance for Greece, for the Middle East, and indeed for the entire future conduct of United States foreign policy. Congressional action on Turkish aid will be completed next week. My original intention was to do very little here in Brussels. But I will now talk to Esenbel again and then I would like very much to talk to you.

A subsequent meeting was arranged to begin between 10:30–10:45 P.M. this evening.

Bitsios: I have one or two more items I would like to mention. But on the first point you will not tell Esenbel about our interest in early negotiations, will you?

The Secretary: Let me put this matter to Esenbel in my own devious way. I certainly will not give him the impression that you are anxious for negotiations.

Bitsios: Can you tell me anything about the possibilities which we read about of further Turkish military moves?

The Secretary: We simply won’t tolerate any, and frankly I don’t believe the Turkish Government is strong enough at the present time to undertake any such activity.

Bitsios: I also want to inform you that with respect to the Aegean, we intend to put this matter before the International Court of Justice.

The Secretary: I want you to know that I have sent General Haig to Turkey to warn against any further military moves. I have made the same point to Esenbel today in the strongest terms.

Bitsios: Concerning the NATO meeting, my Government would find it extremely difficult to have it take place in Ankara. Would there be any possibility of your offering Washington as a site?

Hartman: We should perhaps talk to Luns about it.

The Secretary: I will. (To Hartman:) Could you call the Turks and tell them not to talk to Lunsabout the Cyprus situation at all, because if they do so it will be all over town before the end of the day.

Bitsios: One last point that concerns Ambassador Kubisch and his statement on the Hill.[10](https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v30/d155#fn:1.5.4.4.12.284.194.6) I want the Ambassador to return to Athens in the best possible circumstances. Could there be a further statement that the United States understands the concerns of the Greek Government on Cyprus and with respect to aid to Turkey?

The Secretary: Something alone those lines might be possible, but I want you to know that Ambassador Kubisch said nothing on the Hill with respect to aid to Turkey on my direct instructions.

Bitsios: What about the Humphrey statement implying that based on a statement by a high US official, he could state that the Greek Government would not oppose a continuation of aid to Turkey.

Ambassador Kubisch: I never spoke to Humphrey or, indeed, to any other Senator.

The Secretary: What do we say to the press?

Bitsios: I shall say after the meeting that your interest in a Cyprus settlement is well known, and that you have briefed me in our meeting today on your continuing efforts on this subject.

The Secretary: What should I say?

Bitsios: Anything you wish.

(The Secretary then showed Bitsios the statement made by Turkish Foreign Minister Esenbelfollowing the Turkish-US bilateral this morning.)

The Secretary: The Turkish statement is very bad, but don’t worry, we can overcome this by events through the course of the next day or so. You might wish to say that we will meet again later today. I will say that we had a good talk; that we are both agreed that a solution based on conciliation, and on the interests of all parties is highly desirable; that we are aware of the great concern of the Greek Government

About later this evening, I want you to know that if our meeting starts a little late it is because I must attend the Quadripartite Dinner. Since we have nothing to discuss, the meeting may never end.

Bitsios: That is all right. We will meet between 10:30 and 10:45 this evening.

The Secretary: Thank you.