

# EU AND TURKEY VERSUS THE TURKISH REPUBLIC OF NORTHERN CYPRUS

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The Republic of Turkey's journey towards the European Union has been deliberately littered with many obstacles, one of which has been the Cyprus problem. Attempts to strip this problem of its actual cause and the origins which validate these obstacles have been part of a slow but sure process. Today, no one seems to pay any attention to the actual cause of the Cyprus problem, nor do they think it is relevant anymore. They expect the Turkish Cypriot people and Turkey to accept their point of view and behave accordingly. But, when we talk about the Cyprus problem vis à vis Turkey's accession process to the EU, we must not get lost in detail.

### ***Historical Framework***

The Cyprus problem started in December 1963. Prior to that, in September of the same year, the Ankara Agreement –an association agreement– was signed; it led to Turkey's enrollment into the Customs Union and its subsequent attainment of European Economic Community membership. Therefore, and ironically, the Cyprus problem and Turkey's accession procedure to the EU are of same age.

The Republic of Cyprus was formed in 1960 with two politically equal founding members: the Turkish Cypriots and the Greek Cypriots. Smaller minority groups such as Armenians, Maronites and the Latins were given the option to join one of the two majority communities. Thus, it followed that the colonial power Britain passed its sovereignty over to these two founding communities. However, the Cyprus problem started with an attempt by the Greek Cypriots to oust their Turkish Cypriot partners from government and gain control over the whole island – and commit an act of ethnic cleansing on the island, on a scale that would have dwarfed the massacres in Srebrenica. The Greek Cypriots could have succeeded entirely if it had not been for fear of the international Treaty of Guarantee, which gave rights to the three guarantor powers, Turkey, Greece and the UK, to intervene collectively or unilaterally if the state of affairs created in 1960 was under threat. Nevertheless the 1963 attempt resulted in the overthrowing of the Turkish Cypriot partner from the government, confining the Turkish Cypriot population to only three percent of the island, severing their ties with the outside world and portraying them as rebels.

Turkish Cypriots lived in small enclaves and under constant threat of annihilation from 1963 to 1974, while the Greek Cypriots enjoyed their newly gained status as the government of the entire island. Greek Cypriot officials occupied executive, legislative and judiciary branches of the government. A second attempt to ethnically cleanse the Turkish Cypriots was made in 1974, when a coup was staged which not only ousted their own Greek Cypriot president, but also brought to power a killer and a fanatic called Nicos Sampson, famous for his enmity to Turkish Cypriots.

Ever since 1963, there have been continuous attempts to coerce or bully the Turkish Cypriot people to forget and abjure their original rights. The EU's admission of the South Cyprus administration into the Union, under the guise of the government of the 1960 –Republic of Cyprus– makes no difference to the inherent rights of the Turkish Cypriots. What are these inherent rights? The irrefutable fact that the Turkish Cypriots were one of the two founding members of the original “Republic of Cyprus” and that they were the sovereign equals of the whole island of Cyprus. As long as we keep this in mind and do not relinquish these rights in any way, the EU and other major powers will sooner or later have to make adjustments to their adamant positions.

### **Turkey, Cyprus and the European Union**

When I weigh the pros and cons of Turkey's admission from the EUs perspective, I see that the cons overwhelm the pros. I cannot imagine that a populous, influential country such as Turkey would be a made a partner in the EU and that countries like France and Germany would share power with it. This is not to mention the religion factor. If accepted Turkey shall wield as much, if not more, influence as Germany and France. I find it hard to believe that the “locomotives” of the EU would accept this.

Problems between Greece and Turkey were used by certain members of the EU to keep Turkey at arms length up until the 1997 EU Luxemburg summit. After the 1999 EU Helsinki summit, this role of keeping Turkey out of the EU was passed on to the south Cyprus administration; this administration has been delaying Turkey's accession process successfully ever since. The EU and other major powers conceive the Cyprus problem as a nuisance and approach it accordingly. Perhaps this attitude can be explained by the doctrine of necessity.

As Turkish Cypriots, we are always on our toes when it comes to EU demands of concessions over Cyprus in exchange for progress in Turkey's accession procedure – and we have good reason for this. We were rented out to the United Kingdom stock, lot and barrel in 1878. Then again we were sacrificed and “sold” to the United Kingdom during the formation process of the Republic of Turkey in 1923. We were cut off from our motherland for about a century. And now that we are internationally recognized –despite the common rhetoric– as one of the founding members and sovereign equals of the Republic of Cyprus, we do not want to

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relinquish these rights. Furthermore, the example of the loss of Crete lurks in our memories. We are wary that one day, we could again be sacrificed by some Turkish government for some “greater” cause such as the EU.

We have always been aware that without Turkey’s assistance it would not have been possible to stand where we stand today as one of the peoples of Cyprus. Our gratitude to Turkey is historical and genuine. We share the same language, customs and religion, and celebrate the same events whether religious or national.

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But as Turkish Cypriots, we also exhibit the intricate and complex building blocks of the past of our island. We value whatever differences we have and want to preserve them. This should be understandable and respected.

In 2004, separate and simultaneous referenda were held on the island for a UN sponsored plan (Annan Plan) that was accepted by the Turkish Cypriots by 65 percent. Greek Cypriots, on the other hand, rejected the Annan Plan by an overwhelming majority of 75 percent. Importantly, the Annan Plan did not completely fulfill the expectations of the Turkish Cypriot people. However, Turkey did everything to convince the Turkish Cypriots to vote in favor of the plan hoping that a solution would clear

the obstacles in its path towards the EU. Turkey and the Turkish Cypriots were given guarantees, albeit verbal, by the EU that direct trade would be implemented to alleviate the position of the Turkish Cypriots if the Greek Cypriots voted against the UN plan. Greek Cypriots had been rejecting almost every draft solution plan put in front of them with impunity.

When we examine the EU’s stance on Turkey’s accession –as stated in the December 2010 EU Turkey report, clearly see that Cyprus is still a pre-condition and is used as an excuse for delaying the opening and/or closing of the Chapters for Turkey’s accession. Only 13 of the 33 chapters have been opened so far and only one of them is closed. As a result of Turkey’s non-compliance to full implementation of the additional protocol to the Ankara Agreement, the EU decided not to open the eight new chapters or close existing chapters until Turkey met this obligation.

When we compare this attitude with the accession procedure followed in the case of the “Republic of Cyprus” we note that the Cyprus problem posed no obstacle to the accession of the “Republic of Cyprus”; but it did become an issue when negotiations were undertaken with Turkey. Trying to blackmail Turkey to recognize the so called “Republic of Cyprus” simply because the so called “Republic of Cyprus” is a member of the EU ultimately means making Turkey pay for the EU mistake of admitting a country with serious problems as its member.

Acceptance of the so called “Republic of Cyprus” to the EU was the result of Greece threatening to veto the enlargement process unless Cyprus was included in the membership list. The Annan Plan was proposed as the catalyst in solving the Cyprus problem. But as I have pointed out at the beginning of this article, today no one seems to pay any attention to the actual cause, nor they think it is relevant anymore. Double standards should not surprise anyone in this day and age, which is reminiscent of the gunboat diplomacy era, especially when even the UN is powerless in defending countries’ sovereignty.

The Turkish Cypriots and the Greek Cypriots first started negotiating in 1968 and these negotiations have been going on and off for decades with no result. It is now well established that the Greek Cypriots, using the status bestowed upon them by the international community as the “legal” government of Cyprus, are in no hurry to solve the Cyprus problem. On the contrary, Greek Cypriot leadership sees advantage in engaging in “open ended” negotiations. Greek Cypriot leadership believes that by taking advantage of Turkey’s aspirations to become an EU member, it can wield pressure on Turkey for concessions in Cyprus. They think that when they receive the presidency of the EU in the second half of the 2012, they will be in a much stronger position to obtain these concessions.

Turkey did sign the additional protocol of the Ankara agreement on 29 July 2005 extending the customs union to the 15 new member states of the EU, including the “Republic of Cyprus”. Turkey also issued a declaration alongside this agreement, regarding its non-recognition of “Cyprus”. The EU issued its counter-declaration regarding Turkey’s non-recognition on 21 September 2005. The Intentions and reservations of both sides are now very clear.

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on except benefit Greek Cypriot aspirations of creating problems for Turkey in its path towards EU.

In line with our own findings, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon pointed out in his declarations in New York 2010 and Geneva 2011 –where he met the leaders of the two communities– that the negotiation process must come to an end within a reasonable time period. This represents a blow to Greek Cypriot aspirations of “open ended negotiations”. Clearly the international community is now grasping the fact that unless forced, the Greek Cypriot side has no intention of reaching an agreement with their old partners, the Turkish Cypriots.

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The UN mandate of 1964 (Resolution 186) given to the UN peacekeeping units UNFICYP on the island is outdated. Following the rejection of the Annan Plan by the Greek Cypriots in 2004, the number of these units was reduced from some 1100 personnel to about 860. I believe that the UN is now considering further reductions or even complete withdrawal.

### ***Searching for Solutions***

From the Turkish Cypriot point of view, I believe that the guillotine must come down on the negotiations process. I also believe everything has been covered during the last four decades of negotiations and it is time for both sides to display their skills at political leadership and end this process. If this process ends in agreement, so much the better. But if no reconciliation is possible between the sides, then it is time to declare this accordingly. There is no point in carrying on the negotiations any further as it has been detrimental to the Turkish Cypriot people beyond calculation. The passing of time only makes the sides more entrenched in their positions. New problems arise with time which would not have been problems had the issue been previously solved. Life is not static and development is inevitable. Opinion polls conducted in both sides demonstrate that Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots prefer to rule themselves in their own areas with only necessary cooperation and minimum involvement in each other’s affairs. Parallel to the polls, I argue that the only issues that should be discussed from now on are the property

issue, and possibly some territorial adjustments. International courts have already shed some light on the property issue and described ways for solving it.

Clearly it is in the interests of both Turkey and the Turkish Cypriots to try their best to reach a negotiated and viable solution. In the case of Turkey, this should exclude being blackmailed, and in the case of the Turkish Cypriots this should exclude forgoing their inherent rights. There is a lot to be gained in the region by ending the Cyprus problem, in one way or the other.