

THE CYPRUS DEBATE: A MOMENT FOR HIGH CLASS DIPLOMACY

Why is the EU not pushing the guarantor powers of Cyprus, Great Britain, Greece and Turkey, two of which are member states and one of which is a candidate state, to negotiate about their future roles in Cyprus. Why does the EU not lift the embargo against the Turkish Cypriots right away. Are the efforts so little because there is no real interest to find a settlement for the reunification? If so, why?

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The High Level Contact Group was appointed as the representative body to contribute to the lifting of Turkish Cypriots' isolation, which was promised by then Commissioner Verheugen right after the referendum on the Annan Plan. Even though sixty six percent of Turkish Cypriots voted in favor of the plan, a majority of Greek Cypriots voted against it.

Since May 2004, things have changed in the Northern Cyprus. It has in fact developed, not so much because of the EU, but rather in spite of the EU. The most important barrier, the economic embargo, has not been lifted; the EU's financial aid is yet to be spent, which is a rather difficult manoeuvre, and the Green Line regulation is only a drop of water on a hot stone.

Nevertheless, there is hope at the moment since full-fledged negotiations have started. The two leaders of the communities, Mr. Kristofias and Mr. Talat, have a fair and good chance at writing history and reunifying the island. Nevertheless, I am a bit irritated that the European Union does not show more enthusiasm and provide more help, since this is the momentum to get along and solve the complicated crisis.

A solution in Cyprus is as precious as a solution in Georgia, but the leaders of the European Union member states feel more responsible with regard to the conflict between Russia and Georgia than they do towards the one between the Greek and the Turkish Cypriots. Of course, I do appreciate all efforts of the current EU President, Nicolas Sarkozy, to get things straight in Georgia. There is however, a similar conflict of power struggle in one of his member states, Cyprus, which has now been going on for decades and needs his attention.

I cannot help but ask myself why the EU is not pushing the guarantor powers of Cyprus, Great Britain, Greece and Turkey, two of which are member states and one of which is a candidate state, to negotiate about their future roles in Cyprus.

Do the agreements, which were written down half a century ago, still hold in today's political landscape? I doubt it. I ask myself why the European Union does not lift the embargo against the Turkish Cypriots right away. Is it because they think that the Turkish Cypriots have to learn to become economically independent? If so, an embargo is not the answer/solution to this question. Neither the Greek Cypriots nor the EU will spend as much money as Turkey does today. Are the efforts so little because there is no real interest to find a settlement for the reunification? If so, why?

Politicians in the EU have a very hard time explaining to their citizens the benefits of Turkey's membership to the European Union. EU-citizens do not know enough about the developments regarding economic, democratic and social growth of Turkey. Many have fears of losing what they have gained in recent years. People see globalization or the enlargement of the European Union as a threat. They think that with Turkey's accession the enlargement would get out of control. In this regard, Turkey's size makes them especially nervous.

After full membership negotiations with Turkey started, parties all over Europe that decided to take an anti-Turkey-position, polled higher than the others. Parties that favored the ongoing negotiations lost the confidence of their supporters. The leaders of these parties –many of which are still in power– do not want to break their promises to Turkey. On the other hand, however, they are afraid to lose power, in other words, to lose the elections. This is why they are looking for another exit.

Imagine a scenario in which the negotiations between Kristofias and Talat failed, not because of the two leaders, not because of the people living in Cyprus but because of Turkey, or more precisely, because of the position of the Turkish army. Great Britain holds sovereign military bases on the Island and Greek and French troops are also accepted. What about the Turkish army? This question is like a huge elephant in a small room, nobody dares to touch, which is a mistake, because the elephant might get a bit nervous. Is this what Sarkozy and his company are waiting for? I assure you, this would be the perfect excuse for all leading European politicians to stop the negotiations with Turkey.

The small island of Cyprus does indeed play a key role in the future of the international relations of all the involved states. And in this case, the position of Turkey is a very difficult one. As Great Britain, Greece, and France, Turkey also knows the geostrategic importance of Cyprus. The member states of the European Union and the candidate state Turkey have to come up with a solution. This is the moment for high-class diplomacy. This would bring the countries closer to each other. This would build more confidence. This would heal the tensions. This would convince the citizens.

But who is going to take the first step? Well, certainly the one who does not look back and instead concentrates on the future. I bet it will be Turkey. And I also bet that Turkey will get a non-permanent seat in the Security Council, which it highly deserves.¹

¹ The vote had not yet taken place when the author made this statement.