

THE CYPRUS DILEMMA

By 28 February, the people of Cyprus on both sides of the Green Line, as well as those in the two mainlands of Greece and Turkey are going to decide whether to proceed with the peace plan designed by the United Nations or not. If either side rejects it, then very probably Cyprus will remain a divided island for the foreseeable future and the Greek part of the island will enter the EU as a full member, while the Turkish Cypriots will remain outside it. There is no doubt that an historical opportunity will have been missed, but neither side has an easy choice to make. Some aspects of the Turkish Cypriot situation which even at this late hour ought to be born in mind by everyone.

The reality of the island is that there are two peoples on it, not one. From the start, the core issue is about the rights and freedom of the Turkish Cypriots, not the influence of Turkey or Greece. The formula of a new state suggested by Lord Hannay and which would be formed by two 'constituent' states could go some way to meeting the concerns of the Turkish Cypriots. Only a settlement based on equality can provide for a genuine solution to the ills of the island. Such a settlement will not be easy to reach, as the fitful progress of this year's talks has shown. But Greek Cypriot accession will only make it more difficult, if not impossible. The direct talks between the leaders must continue, because they open the way to a solution by removing the imbalance between the sides. And the EU and the international community must also do everything in their power to encourage the removal of this asymmetry.

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In the next few weeks, the people of Cyprus on both sides of the Green Line, as well as those in the two mainlands of Greece and Turkey are going to have to make a fateful decision. By 28 February, they will have to decide whether to proceed with the peace plan designed by the United Nations or not. If either side rejects it, then very probably Cyprus will remain a divided island for the foreseeable future and the Greek part of the island will enter the EU as a full member, while the Turkish Cypriots will remain outside it.

There is no doubt that an historical opportunity will have been missed, but neither side has an easy choice to make. I believe that there are some aspects of the Turkish Cypriot situation which even at this late hour ought to be born in mind by everyone.

Just because a national community is very small does not mean that it does not have international rights. The Gibraltarians are a much smaller community than the Turkish Cypriots, but Britain is committed to defending them and their right to administer themselves and live as they choose. This right is based on the Treaty of Utrecht, which is three centuries old. Treaties can be renegotiated with the consent of all parties, but they do not lose their force with the mere passage of time.

The rights of the Turkish Cypriots, which have a more recent basis in international law, have not always enjoyed the same protection. It is hard to see how UN recognition of the Greek Cypriot administration as the sole *de jure* government of Cyprus can be reconciled with the settlement of 1960, which established a partnership government between the Turkish and Greek Cypriots.

Two generations later, as Cypriots try to build a new partnership, their efforts may be undermined by another breach of that settlement. According to the 1960 treaties, Cyprus cannot join an organization in which Greece and Turkey are not members. Yet the Greek Cypriot administration has applied to join the European Union, and a decision on that application is expected in the coming months.

We are now at a very critical point in the history of Cyprus; it is equally clear that this presents a policy challenge that involves not only the Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot leadership, but Turkish, Greek and European policy-makers as well. If a satisfactory solution is reached in Cyprus, problems in Turkish-Greek relations and Turkey's EU accession process may also be more easily solved. If the Cyprus issue is not resolved satisfactorily, then we shall face a serious deadlock and perhaps even a major crisis. It is no wonder that British diplomats refer to Cyprus as the "banana skin of the Levant."

Face-to-face negotiations between Presidents Denktas and Clerides have now been continuing for almost a year; they have reached the stage when results are expected. After his Paris meetings with the two leaders in September, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan expressed optimism that "the elements of a comprehensive settlement that would meet the basic needs of both sides do, in fact, exist."

If we listen to the two leaders themselves, it is easier to pinpoint the elements that still divide the sides. On his return from Paris, President Denktas reiterated his commitment to the establishment of a new state composed of two equal, sovereign states. This state would replace the 'Republic of Cyprus'. President Clerides remained adamant that Greek Cypriots will not relinquish the Republic of Cyprus, which lays claim to the entire island. This issue is clearly the crux of the matter.

The reality of the island is that there are two peoples on it, not one. From the start, the core issue is about the rights and freedom of the Turkish Cypriots, not the influence of Turkey or Greece. No outside force, neither Turk nor Greek Cypriot, has the right to speak for the Turkish Cypriots. They are a separate people and their rights must be respected, even if the UN plan envisages the return of a fairly large percentage of Greeks to the north and the restoration of a mixed population. Frenchmen are not Germans. Germans are not Poles. And in the same way, Turks and Greeks on Cyprus may all be Cypriots but they remain different nationalities. No settlement which does not respect this difference can be expected to last for very long.

Recent comments by Lord Hannay, Britain's Special Representative on Cyprus, perhaps offer some insight into how this balance might be achieved. Lord Hannay has suggested a new state which would be formed by two 'constituent' states where, in the last resort, sovereignty would reside. This formula, which has something in common with the Belgian model, could go some way to meeting the concerns of the Turkish Cypriots, who have enjoyed independence for a quarter of a century and will not relinquish it to be ruled – as they see it – by Greek Cypriots.

Those concerns have been exacerbated by the lack of symmetry that is embedded in the processes and institutions involved in the search for a solution. It is not possible to make real progress by consistently pressuring one side and trying to isolate it. To achieve the conditions for real progress, it is necessary to create conditions that promote security through mutual agreement – by giving both sides an equal incentive to compromise and advance. In Cyprus, if history is any guide to go by, no outside initiative, whether from the EU or anyplace else, can lead to progress without these conditions.

The Greek Cypriot application for EU membership, and their expectation that it will in due course be accepted, leaves them with no incentive to deal on an equal basis with the Turkish Cypriots. In fact recognition of Turkish Cypriot sovereignty would only jeopardize their existing monopoly of international recognition. So rather than sharing power, as the 1960 constitution envisaged, Greek Cypriots have taken advantage of their position to weaken Turkish Cypriot society.

The policy of asymmetry and the ensuing embargo, which lacks any legal foundation, have dealt a heavy blow to the Turkish Cypriot economy. This, in turn, has obliged the Turkish Cypriots to move closer and closer to Turkey. Instead of reuniting the island, these harsh tactics have exacerbated its division and complicated the search for a settlement. If there is a breakdown on 28 February, then these policies will no doubt return with vigour and the situation in the Eastern Mediterranean will get even more tense and unmanageable.

Aside from these lasting negative effects, the policy of besieging the Turkish Cypriots was in itself unprecedented. Where else in Europe, when one group stood up for its rights against another, has the rest of Europe responded with a blockade and an attempt to starve the weaker group into submission? European policy makers should have been building bridges on Cyprus, not fences.

At a time when building a settlement will require all parties to correct the errors of the past, Greek Cypriot admission into the EU will compound them. By admitting only Greek Cyprus, the EU would not only inflate the existing asymmetry to an even greater level, it will also

publicly trample the rights of Turkish Cypriots. By doing so, Europe sets a dangerous example for Greek Cypriots and the rest of the world. With sole EU membership secured for them and not for the Turkish Cypriots, it is doubtful that Greek Cypriots would ever consider a compromise with the island's other inhabitants.

In addition, Greek Cypriot membership will import the Cyprus dispute into the EU's governmental body, with all of the dangers that this implies. The Green Line would then be consecrated as the permanent frontier between the two peoples of the island. In addition to alienating the Turkish Cypriots, this decision would drive a permanent wedge between the EU and Turkey, a vital source of stability and security in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Turkey's rights and obligations as a guarantor power for the Turkish Cypriots are enshrined in the 1960 agreements. How might she respond to such an action on the EU's part?

Such a crucial question obviously requires an answer, even if it is a hypothetical one, though some of the speculation on this subject has perhaps not been very helpful to those engaged in the more urgent task of devising a viable settlement.

It is sometimes said that Turkey would respond by annexing northern Cyprus. Annexation of a territory is typically an expansionist action by a larger state without regard for the wishes of the smaller state. This is a most unlikely outcome, as the slightest acquaintance with Turkish foreign policy in republican times will show.

"Closer integration" between Turkey and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus is also frequently mentioned as a possible response to Greek Cypriot accession. This could include a broad range of actions, some of them very natural and others more troubling.

We should recognize that making northern Cyprus a sovereign part of Turkey – even if it is done at the request of Turkish Cypriots and approved in a referendum – will not solve the most pressing difficulties of the Turkish Cypriots. Indeed, it may ensure that Turks suffer them as well.

The biggest problems facing the Turkish Cypriots are the international legal difficulties which result from lack of recognition, and the economic embargo. Countries which have withheld their recognition from the Turkish Cypriots for decades are not likely to behave differently in the event of a union with Turkey. Indeed, there is a real risk that instead of ending the isolation of Northern Cyprus, territorial union would spread that isolation to Turkey, which would mean a flight of resources, and a sharp worsening of diplomatic relations with our natural partners: in short, a dangerous circle of isolation and economic decline that may not be easy to reverse.

In some areas, Greek Cypriot accession would inevitably draw Turkey and the TRNC closer together. The international embargo would probably be strengthened by Greek Cypriot membership, making it even more difficult for Turkish Cypriots to engage in commercial relations with anyone other than Turkey. That would bring strong pressure for economic integration. Legal difficulties stemming from lack of recognition could also be lightened by various forms of cooperation.

It would be difficult for Greek Cypriots to oppose such measures with any consistency. They have pursued an active agenda of closer integration with Greece in many areas. The two

governments have signed agreements to work together in the fields of energy, advanced technology, industry, tourism, health care provision, and the environment. Recent trade figures suggest the two economies are more closely linked than ever. There is talk of moves to ease the process of gaining dual citizenship. It is developments like these that have raised fears among Turkish Cypriots of a form of enosis through one-sided EU membership.

Only a settlement based on equality can banish such concerns. Such a settlement will not be easy to reach, as the fitful progress of this year's talks has shown. But Greek Cypriot accession will only make it more difficult, if not impossible. The direct talks between the leaders must continue, because they open the way to a solution by removing the imbalance between the sides. And the EU and the international community must also do everything in their power to encourage the removal of this asymmetry. Self-imposed deadlines are not the way forward.

As concerned citizens of any country involved, we must realistically ask ourselves whether a final, comprehensive and sustainable settlement can be found in such a short time for a problem riddled with the complexities and historical baggage of a situation like Cyprus. I want to believe that it is not an excessive hope. I want to believe that we have more reason than ever to be hopeful now and can look forward to a new unified Cyprus as member of the UN and EU. I hope that this union is created by two politically equal peoples, the Greek and Turkish Cypriots, with well-defined powers and full discretion in conducting their home affairs, in an agreed upon governmental structure.

The settlement of the Cyprus problem will diffuse many existing problems between Turkey and Greece. It will boost the atmosphere of friendship initiated by Cem and Papandreu while proving to pessimists in both countries that progress is not unattainable.

As Turks and Greeks in the Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean, we make up a distinct European community of our own. We have been in symbiosis for over a millennium. We can recreate this symbiosis, and guarantee our security, equality, peace, and solidarity, under the common roof of the EU. If we can make the conscious, short-term sacrifices that are needed to secure these long-term gains, then we can look forward to a day when three decades of confrontation will seem like a bad dream. The best way to start is by approaching the delicate troubles of Cyprus in a spirit of partnership and equality.

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