

TURKISH CYPRIOTS' EXPECTATIONS FROM THE EUROPEAN UNION

It has been more than a year that the Turkish Cypriots, responding to the calls of the international community and embracing the values of the EU integration process, convincingly voted in favor of the Annan Plan. The Union should accept that Cyprus, for the time being, is an unusual case of a federal bi-communal member state in which the central level of government had, by default, put itself into a situation of having zero jurisdiction in one entity and should not, therefore, let the Greek Cypriot Administration to be a stumbling block for the economic development of Turkish Cypriots.

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Last year, the two communities of Cyprus reached a critical turning point, which left its mark on history as an un-seized opportunity to resolve the long-standing political problem on the island. Referenda, simultaneously held on both sides of the island on 24 April 2004 for the approval of UN Secretary-General's proposal for a Comprehensive Settlement, the Annan Plan, ended up producing great disappointment in the international community; Greek Cypriots failed to respond in the same constructive and compromising spirit as Turkish Cypriots.

Following that, on 26 April 2004, the EU General Affairs and External Relations Council stated its determination to put an end to the isolation of the Turkish Cypriot community so as to facilitate the unification of Cyprus by encouraging the economic development of northern Cyprus and asked the European Commission to take concrete steps to this end (General Affairs Council, 2004). It is unfortunate, however, that the EU's determination did not go beyond its stated intention on paper. The Commission's two regulations, drafted in accordance with the Council's invitation, aiming to provide direct aid to Turkish Cypriots and starting direct trade between the North and the EU, have been blocked by counter efforts from Greek Cypriots within EU institutions after being granted membership in the European Council on 1 May 2004.

For some observers, the main reason for missing such a historic chance and for the stalemate in the materialization of EU's promises can be explained by the delayed transformation of the Turkish Cypriot leadership in accordance with the political and economic changes in the region and by the election of a hardline Greek Cypriot leader, Tassos Papadopoulos. Some political circles in Europe have used this partially correct reasoning to justify full-membership of a divided country in the EU. Nevertheless, a quick glance at our recent past, with particular emphasis on the Greek Cypriots' EU bid, will reveal that in order to properly judge the source of the latest UN effort's failure and to find a way out of the current deadlock, one needs to look beyond the intra-island developments and at the underlying dynamics of the EU's involvement in this process.

A retrospective look at today's prevailing political circumstances, with an emphasis on the EU's approach to enlargement will help to outline the expectations of Turkish Cypriots from the EU within the context of the most recent developments. The EU bears a historic responsibility for restoring equality to the political dynamics in the discussion and negotiation of the Cyprus problem that was harmed by the full-membership of the Greek Cypriot Administration in the EU on behalf of the whole island. The EU needs to create suitable conditions for the resumption of bilateral negotiations in Cyprus under the auspices of the UN.

A Retrospective Look at Today's Prevailing Political Circumstances

In 1990, when the Greek Cypriot leadership, purporting to be the legitimate government of the "Republic of Cyprus" or "ROC," applied for membership in

the EU, Cyprus had been physically divided for twenty seven years and psychologically for far longer. This situation presented the EU with a challenging dilemma. Could the EU accept a divided island, and would such an acceptance be in compliance with the spirit of European Integration?

It was because of this dilemma that the Union adopted a cautious stance vis-à-vis membership of purely Greek-Cypriot-represented “ROC.” In its opinion on Cyprus, expressed three years after accepting the application of the “ROC,” the European Commission opted for a “first solution, then membership” strategy by stating that “as soon as the prospect for solution is surer, the Community is ready to start the process with Cyprus that should eventually lead to its accession.”¹ However, the European Council did not follow this strategy. In 1994, at the Corfu Summit, the strategy changed to one in which a solution to the Cyprus problem was no longer a precondition for opening accession talks with the “ROC.”² Reasons for this shift included Greece’s ability to link the Cyprus issue with greater issues in the context of the EU and particularly its threats to veto the customs union between Turkey and EU as well as eastern enlargement.

Undoubtedly, analyzing the EU decision-making process is not the intention of this paper. Still, the EU’s structural inability to carry out the strategy identified at the supranational level (European Commission) to the intergovernmental level (European Council) played a pivotal role in changing the established political balance between the two sides in Cyprus. Or to put it more bluntly, by explicitly stating that finding a comprehensive settlement in the island was no longer a precondition for starting a process that would eventually lead to EU membership of the “ROC,” the EU actually adopted the role of an “interested secondary party” in its relations with Cyprus. This meant that instead of remaining impartial to Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots, the Union ended up on the same side as the Greek Cypriots.³

The *fait accompli* involvement of the EU in the Cyprus dispute increased as the Greek Cypriots progressed with their EU ambition. The final blow to the peace process came at the December 1999 Helsinki Summit, where EU leaders decided to trade their approval of the “ROC’s” accession for Greece’s removal of its veto to grant Turkey candidate country status.⁴ The EU believed that the prospect of EU membership alone would be enough to enchant the Turkish Cypriots and to convince them to join the EU track with the Greek Cypriots. Nevertheless, the Turkish Cypriot leadership, led by hardliner President Rauf Denktaş, attempted to walk away from the UN-led negotiation process several times. This included walking away from talks for the Annan Plan, which most of the international

¹ Commission of the European Communities, “Opinion on Cyprus: Eligibility for Membership,” 30 June 1993, Brussels: General Secretariat of the Council.

² European Council, “Presidency Conclusions, Corfu, 24-25 June 1994,” Brussels: General Secretariat of the Council.

³ Ulaf Doğa Eralp and Nimet Beriker. “Assessing the Conflict Resolution Potential of the EU: The Cyprus Conflict and Accession Negotiations,” *Security Dialogue*, Vol.36, No.2 (2005), pp.175-190, and p.181.

⁴ European Council, “Presidency Conclusions, Helsinki, 10-11 December 1999,” Brussels: General Secretariat of the Council.

community saw as the pinnacle of compromise for a comprehensive settlement on the island.

During that period, high-level representatives of the European Union also contributed to the escalation of tension by making continuous assurances that the “ROC” would be accepted as a member of the EU by May 2004, even in the event that both sides did not agree on a solution for the entire island. The Greek Cypriot leadership, comforted by EU support and hiding behind intransigent Turkish policies, did nothing other than wait until they signed the Accession Treaty in April 2003 as the only internationally recognized government on the island of Cyprus.

The signing of the Accession Treaty coincided with a period when significant changes were taking place in the domestic scene of both the Republic of Turkey and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus or TRNC. These changes were perceived as a new opportunity for the resolution of the Cyprus question. To be more precise, the remarkable success of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) in the November 2002 parliamentary elections held in Turkey and, more importantly, the defeat of the pro-status-quo parties in the TRNC with the coming to power of pro-European forces in the December 2003 general elections, contributed to the beginning of a new era where concerted policies by the Turkish Cypriot leadership and the Turkish Government have been decisively shaped by a vision of EU membership. Accordingly, both voiced their determination to work towards finding a solution to the conflict before the accession of “Cyprus” in May 2004, and appealed to the UN Secretary-General to take on a new initiative for the resumption of bi-communal talks on his proposed plan.

Therefore it was disappointing for the Turkish Cypriot leadership that the Greek Cypriot leadership, having secured a place within the EU, hardened its stance during the final round of talks and created an impasse rather than being more forthcoming. The sheer number of “No” votes on behalf of Greek Cypriots in the 24 April 2004 referenda reflects strongly the outcome of the negative stance assumed by leading Greek Cypriot parties.

It can be concluded, in light of the above, that although on the surface it looks as if the EU has had only a minor influence on the resolution of the Cyprus conflict (or lack thereof), that is not the case. The EU’s decision at the Corfu Summit to start accession talks with the “ROC” without taking into account the fundamental rights of Turkish Cypriots emanating from international agreements marked a crucial turning point for this long-standing political problem. In other words, the EU’s biased involvement in the conflict, as part of its historical enlargement project, initiated a process whereby the balance of negotiation power shifted increasingly to the Greek Cypriot side and unjustly enabled them to assert their demands from Turkish Cypriots.

Turkish Cypriots' Expectations from the EU

Given that the EU's enlargement policy has distorted the parameters of the Cyprus conflict established during the last four decades by UN negotiations and given that this created ambiguity for maintaining an equilibrium based approach towards both communities on the island; the Union now bears a historic responsibility to help achieve a breakthrough and particularly to create suitable conditions for the resumption of negotiations on Cyprus.

In identifying the methods of its future involvement, the EU should also take into consideration the fundamental needs of Turkish Cypriots. If the Union continues to act only in line with the whims and wishes of Greek Cypriots, it will again deny both sides the opportunity to reach a comprehensive settlement under the good offices mission of the UN Secretary General.

It has been more than a year that the Turkish Cypriots, responding to the calls of the international community and embracing the values of the EU integration process, convincingly voted in favor of the Annan Plan. However, the present state of affairs continues to reflect the absence of a comprehensive settlement, characterized acutely by a missed opportunity at uniting Cyprus, due to the rejection of the Annan Plan by Greek Cypriots. More importantly, the positive response by the EU to the constructive attitude of the Turkish Cypriots in the aftermath of the referenda, which included promises to relieve the isolation of the northern part of the Cyprus by undertaking new bi-lateral commercial and economic initiatives, has not materialized due to the obstructionist attitude of the Greek Cypriot side.

Under these circumstances, what the Turkish Cypriots expect from the EU is quite clear: that the EU keep its promises of direct aid for encouraging socio-economic investments and the start of direct trade with the ultimate goal of free trade in line with its own expressed will, as well as that of the UN Secretary General's, in order to end the isolation of the Turkish Cypriot people.

We are well aware that the advantageous position granted to the Greek Cypriot side on 1 May 2004 as a voting member of the European Council is playing a significant role in delaying the approval of these measures by the Council. However, the Union should accept that Cyprus, for the time being, is an unusual case of a federal bi-communal member state in which the central level of government had, by default, put itself into a situation of having zero jurisdictions in one entity and should not, therefore, let the Greek Cypriot Administration be a stumbling block for the economic development of Turkish Cypriots.

Bearing in mind that the overall aim of Turkish Cypriots will always be the achievement of a comprehensive solution to the Cyprus issue on the basis of a bi-communal, bi-zonal model of federal state, such a positive move by the EU

would urge Greek Cypriots to realize the fact that Cyprus was established as a partnership state and eventually instigate them to withdraw their demand for exclusive sovereignty over the whole island. Inter-connectedly, it would increase Turkish Cypriots' trust towards the EU. Turkish Cypriots' have always regarded the EU as an entity for which diversity constitutes a source of strength rather than weakness, intolerance or conflict.

In approaching the critical Enlargement Conference, on 3 October 2005, it is important for EU leaders to fully comprehend that asking Turkey to recognize the "ROC" or normalize its legal and political relations with that entity would be equally unfair to both Turkey and Turkish Cypriots. Turkey has successfully met the Copenhagen criteria and been found eligible to engage into the process that would eventually lead to its full-membership.⁵ What needs to be done with regards to Turkey now is the stabilization of its accession process and in particular, the starting of accession negotiations without delay.

History evidences that in the contrary case, if the EU attempts to equate Turkey's progress in its EU bid with the resolution of the Cyprus issue in line with the expectations of Greek Cypriots, it is likely that the division of the island would deepen further and that Turkey would again become an alienated candidate country, in an era in which the rhetoric about the clash of civilizations is gaining more ground than ever.

⁵ European Council, "Presidency Conclusions, Brussels, 16-17 December 2004," Brussels: General Secretariat of the Council.
