

CYPRUS ACCESSION TO THE EU AND THE SOLUTION
OF THE CYPRUS PROBLEM
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The Cyprus problem is in danger of becoming the longest outstanding unresolved problem of the world. Germany has been reunited, the problem of North Ireland has been nearly solved, we have just received the good news from Indian and Pakistan concerning Kashmir but the Cyprus problem is still there.¹ The United Nations and the World Community has for decades now tried hard to solve the Cyprus problem but unfortunately without success. The reason was quite simple. After the Greek junta's coup d'etat and the Turkish invasion and occupation of nearly 40% of the Cyprus Republic's territory, Turkey and Mr. Denktash felt that they had the upper hand and they were simply not interested in a solution.

The lack of balance of power between Greece and Turkey and the perceived value that mainly the U.S. placed on Turkey's strategic significance in the region made it obvious that the only hope for a solution of the Cyprus problem was a change of the equation: the addition of a new player. This new player was the European Union. (We use the term E.U. all through the article although it is well known that the name changed twice over the period). Undoubtedly the biggest achievement of the European Union was that the continent of Europe, which was the world's major battle field for the last centuries, has at last found peace, stability and the resulting prosperity. Within the Union the idea of a war between any of its member states is impossible to

¹ We are not dealing in this article with the other major problem of the world: the Israel-Palestinian conflict and all its very important ramifications.

even consider. Human rights for all citizens of the Union are fully guaranteed and respected, the various nationalities small or large live in peace and cooperate actively for the common benefit. The rich nations help the poor to become also rich. Equality of races and sexes has become a reality and a way of life.

If Cyprus had become member of the Union there would have been no strife between the Greek and Turkish Cypriots. The sufferings and death of so many innocent people would have been avoided. Neither union with Greece nor taksim would have been a realistic slogan. The rights of the Turkish Cypriots' community would have been protected from the very beginning. But we all know very well this was not the case. Unfortunately shortly after independence the intercommunal strife started and the Turkish Cypriots withdrew from the government into their enclaves.

Official relations with the European Community were established in 1972 when the Economic Cooperation Agreement with the Republic of Cyprus was signed. The Turkish Cypriots at that time although not participating in the government expressed their agreement because they realized that the prospect of closer relations with the E.U. would have been to their benefit as well.

The second phase of the agreement which implied the creation of a Customs Union should have started in 1978. After the invasion in 1974, however, the E.U. initially was reluctant to proceed with the second stage of the agreement. They waited for several years and the customs union started only 10 years later as from the 1st January 1988. In the meantime they had established that the lack of progress towards a solution was due to the Turkish intransigence.

Similarly the application of Cyprus to join the European Union was made subsequently to the failure of the nearly two years' efforts by the United Nations and the formal breakdown of the talks as a result of Mr Denktash's behavior in February 1990 in New York. The Cyprus government, when making the application in July 1990, pointed out its ardent desire to achieve a solution and the reunification of the island by the time of accession. Clearly if the Turkish side wanted a solution there was plenty of time to find one from the day of the application until the beginning of the accession talks. The European Union, when accepting Cyprus's application in 1993, pointed out its support for the U.N's efforts and expressed the hope that the prospect of joining the Union would contribute towards finding a solution.

As we have pointed out, however, Mr. Denktash and the so-called Turkish 'Deep State' was not interested and were hoping that they could prolong the status quo at infinitum. Thus all efforts to find a solution prior to 1998, when the accession talks started, failed. Efforts continued after March 1998 although without success. During this whole period it was quite obvious that the accession to the European Union and the solution of the Cyprus problem were two parallel procedures which, however, were highly inter-related between them. The Helsinki Summit's Resolution in December 1999 stated:

- "a. The European Council welcomes the launch of the talks aiming at a comprehensive settlement of the Cyprus problem on 3 December in New York and expresses its strong support for the UN Secretary-General's efforts to bring the process to a successful conclusion.*
- b. The European Council underlines that a political settlement will facilitate the accession of Cyprus to the European Union. If no settlement has been reached by the completion of accession negotiations, the Council's decision on accession will be made without the above being a precondition. In this the Council will take account of all relevant factors."*

Obviously the E.U. was not prepared under any circumstances to accept that the lack of a solution due to Turkish intransigence would be a reason for keeping Cyprus out of the Union. On the contrary they were sincerely hoping that the accession of Cyprus would contribute greatly towards reuniting the island. This is why the U.N. efforts were intensified leading to the submission of the Annan Plan in the autumn of 2002. Efforts to achieve an agreement on the basis of the Plan continued until the last moment in Copenhagen. It was, indicative of both the U.N. and the E.U. desire to promote the reunification of the island that during the last days before the finalization of the negotiations another major effort was made. Unfortunately again they could not succeed because of Turkey's and Mr. Denktash's attitude. After the failure of the talks, the E.U. had no choice but to accept as member the Republic of Cyprus as a whole specifying that "as long as there is no solution the application of the *acquis* in the occupied areas is suspended. Once the island will be reunited automatically the T/C federated state will be part of the E.U. and all Turkish Cypriots, in the same way as all East Germans, will be citizens of the Union".

The accession of Cyprus to the European Union has completely changed the equation. Even at the last moment Mr. Denktash and the Turkish establishment tried to influence the decision of the European Union. They issued several threatening statements and insisted that Cyprus should not be accepted to the Union. The Union and the government of the Republic faced all these threats with patience and self-constraint, knowing quite well that Turkey was not able to implement any of them. This policy has been fully vindicated, since shortly after accession all threats will have been forgotten.

The reaction in the occupied areas after Cyprus's accession was dramatic. We witnessed the two huge spontaneous demonstrations which conveyed clearly and loudly the message: "enough is enough we want a solution now". We are therefore facing a completely new situation now which

is changing the equation and it is hoped that earlier or later will lead to the reunification of the island. Let us therefore examine in somewhat greater detail why the accession of Cyprus to the Union should at last lead to the solution.

We start with Turkey. Turkey has for some time now realized that through accession to the E.U. they can address effectively the many problems the country is facing. For a long time a significant part of the Turkish establishment was under the illusion that Turkey could succeed in joining the Union without radically changing the basic characteristics of the country's political system i.e. the army could continue playing the leading and decisive role in all the institutions of the Republic. Furthermore, they hoped they could at infinitum deny the recognition of the separate identity of the Kurdish people, the respect of human rights and continue with the illegal occupation of North Cyprus. The political system in all E.U. countries is radically different from the above. In the E.U. and all other democracies around the world the army is in the barracks and loyal to the political leadership of each country. Human rights are fully respected, equality of nations and communities is a reality and of course the use of force to occupy another country is unimaginable.

Turkey's leadership thought that they could get away by underlining the special character of Turkey as the spear of NATO in the region. The dissolution of the Soviet Union and recently the events in Iraq proved that there is no such a role anymore. If Turkey wants to join the Union it cannot be treated differently, it has to become a democratic nation respecting all the basic principles of the Union like all other countries.

On the Cyprus issue Turkey for a long time was trying to make capital of the fact that the solution of the Cyprus problem was not one of the Copenhagen criteria. This is absolutely true. However, the Union has sent a very clear message to Turkey: although the Cyprus problem is not one of the

Copenhagen criteria the solution of the Cyprus problem is the best proof Turkey can give to the E.U. that it has changed its behavior and respects the human rights, integrity and sovereignty of all other nations.

It was the realization of this simple truth subsequent to Cyprus's accession that has made the government of Mr. Erdogan to change its attitude towards the solution of the Cyprus problem. They are preparing the ground towards accepting the Annan Plan as a basis for negotiations leading to a solution. Until recently, however, Mr Denktash and Turkey were claiming that the Annan Plan was dead and insisted on the recognition of the so-called realities i.e. the existence of two independent states in Cyprus.

This propaganda became meaningless after the European Union accepted Cyprus as a whole into the Union. Assuming Turkey was to continue the occupation of Cyprus and non-recognition of the Republic it would find itself in a very difficult and rather ridiculous situation. Turkey is applying to join the Union of 25 members, but at the same time refuses to recognize one of the 25 countries. This fact alone would be sufficient to kill Turkey's application to join the Union. Therefore Turkey after May 2004 will have to recognize the Republic, re-open its Embassy and downgrade its representation in the so-called 'Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus'. Furthermore, they realize that it is not possible to persist with their application while occupying by force North Cyprus i.e. part of the territory of the Union.

It became thus obvious to most in Turkey that to get a date for the start of accession negotiations by the end of 2004, they have to solve the Cyprus problem. They have to accept the Annan Plan as a basis for negotiation and convince both the European Union and the international community that they are serious in their desire to reach a solution. The meeting in Ankara with the T/C leaders at the beginning of January and the relevant statements by Prime Minister Erdogan and Foreign Minister Gul are a

first step in this direction. We must not forget however that we are still not there. Many in the establishment try desperately to maintain the status-quo and secure a date for accession negotiations without its prior solution. The need therefore exists but there may well be delays.

Coming now to the Turkish Cypriots: We know that many believed Mr Denktash's well-known arguments against accession. In a speech I made back in 1995 to T/C in North Nicosia (the first ever by a Greek Cypriot) I answered all these arguments and as these are all valid today as well, I quote some relevant parts.

«What about the Turkish Cypriots? What options do they have?

One option is to remain as they are today: isolated, without international recognition, unable to adopt an independent economic policy since the economy is virtually fully integrated with that of Turkey, suffering from inflation, lack of foreign investment, lack of a clear-cut and internationally recognised legal structure, the inability to legally export products, etc. The status quo, I hope we can agree, is not an option and this is also the position taken by the international community.

So what are the remaining options? I hope we can all agree that the prospect of gaining legitimacy through international recognition does not arise. Not so much because of the role that Greek Cypriots or Greece can play, but mainly because it is impossible for the international community to agree to legalise the division of a sovereign state, a member of the United Nations, by force. It would create a very painful precedent, for which a very high price would be paid on an international scale.

If this second option is also not a real option, what is left? The prospect of full integration into Turkey's economy. But in practical terms, this is what is already happening today. There is a free exchange of goods between the north

of Cyprus and Turkey, free movement of people and capital, a common currency, a common telecommunications network. It is therefore, not really a very different option from the continuation of the status quo. In any event, as the Turkish Foreign Minister Mr. Inonou stated in Athens a few weeks ago, such a perspective does not arise. Turkey does not want or intend to annex North Cyprus and therefore only one real option remains: that of solving the Cyprus problem and of the reunited federal Cyprus becoming a full member of the European Union.”

Many T/C were probably under the impression that Turkey’s importance was such that Cyprus could never be accepted to the Union without its agreement. After December 14th, however, they came to see the truth and they knew pretty well that without a solution they will find themselves in an extremely difficult situation. Living isolated in a non-recognized entity, part of an island illegally occupied by Turkey and without being able to take any advantage of Cyprus’s membership in the Union unless they themselves also recognize the Republic and accept to become citizens of the Republic. This is why after Copenhagen we witnessed those grandiose demonstrations in support of the Annan Plan. After that nothing was the same any more. The ‘Green Line’ was partly opened, T/C were permitted to come and work in the Republic and finally the T/C in the recent elections voted in their overwhelming majority in favour of the opposition parties wanting a solution.

The T/C citizens obviously want to forget the past conflicts and see their island reunited within the frame of a bicomunal, bizonal federation. For them the choice was easy because with a solution they have everything to gain, without a solution they have everything to lose. They today realize that the idea that the Turkish Cypriots will lose their identity within a federal Cyprus that is part of Europe is wholly unattainable. On the contrary, this identity would be safeguarded because that is the practice and established policy of the European Union. The European Union is a diverse, multilateral, multi-ethnic,

multi religious entity. The Maastricht Treaty provides the most effective guarantees for all nationalities and ethnic communities living within the European Union. Furthermore, by enshrining the principle of subsidiarity, the European Union ascertains that decisions are taken by the citizens themselves. In practice, this means that most decisions affecting the Turkish Cypriot community would be taken by elected Turkish Cypriot representatives.

Moreover, in addition to prohibiting any discrimination, the Maastricht Treaty gives the various regions comprising the community, the opportunity to participate in the formulation of all relevant policies through the so-called Committee of the Regions. Already 50 of Europe's regions have established permanent offices in Brussels to represent their interests. Therefore, within the frame of Cyprus's membership to the European Union, the Turkish Cypriot community will not only feel safe and secure because of the protection that Europe provides, but furthermore will have the opportunity to contribute to the formulation of European policies through participation in the Committee of the Regions.

I would also like to point out that the Community provides substantial funding for the preservation and strengthening of local institutions for the study of the traditions and history of each region and nationality or ethnic group for the preservation and development of the culture, art and folklore of all such ethnic groups.

In the same speech I also answered various other negative arguments "If Cyprus joins the European Union many claim, the Turkish guarantees will not be valid and for us the guarantee of Turkey is a *sina qua non*." This is a well known argument, but we should never forget that the safest form of security is multilateral and not bilateral. No nation, however large or powerful, can alone provide enough security to protect its own interests. It is no coincidence that for so many years Turkey has been a member of the NATO alliance. Membership of the European Union automatically leads to membership of the Western

European Union, of which Turkey is also an associate member. I cannot imagine that the Basques, the Flemish, the Walloons, the Tyroleans, feel their security is in danger now that the nation-states of which they are part are members of the European Union. It is no exaggeration to state that only within the frame of the European Union, will all Cypriots, Greek and Turkish Cypriots alike, really feel secure.

What about the other argument? That Cyprus joining the European Union without Turkey is equal to enosis of Cyprus with Greece? This is really a naive argument, and I do not think even those people who use it believe in it. Because the rules and regulations of the European Union are known as very strict and no nation can take advantage or prevail on any other member state or part of a member state, however powerful that nation may be. And clearly Greece is anything but the most powerful nation of the European Union, with at present only 5 out of 87 votes.

The next series of arguments relate to the danger of Turkish Cypriots being dominated economically by the Greek Cypriots. This is again false because within the European Union no nation has been able to dominate any other nation, nor has any group of people been able to dominate any other group of people, however strong or powerful. On the contrary, the whole philosophy and one of the founding principles of the European Union is to support the weak, to strengthen them and enable them to match the competition from those that are stronger.

Another variant of this argument is that "we will not be able to compete with the Greeks because they are more powerful economically". The gap between the Greek Cypriots and the Turkish Cypriots in the last twenty years since they have lived separately has increased rather than decreased. If the status quo continues, there is no reason to suppose that this will change. On the contrary, the indications are that the gap will become even wider. In contrast,

within the frame of a solution, huge sums of money through aid, various funds and investments will pour into the Turkish Cypriot area, while free trade and free movement of labour and capital will very quickly lead to the equalisation of earnings and living standards of the two communities through the very rapid rise in the standard of living and earnings of the Turkish Cypriots. So it is by remaining separate that you will ensure that you are never able to compete effectively with the Greek Cypriots, whilst by solving the Cyprus problem and joining a reunited federal Cyprus, a member of the European Union, you can be certain that the Turkish Cypriots will be able to develop their entrepreneurial and productive abilities to the full, for their own benefit and for the benefit of Cyprus as a whole.

Membership of the European Union will bring:

- a stable currency linked to the ECU,
- a safe economy which will attract huge sums in foreign investment,
- a large inflow of tourists and tourist-related investment
- the ability of Cyprus to exploit its full potential as a centre for services for the whole of the Eastern Mediterranean

It will give Turkish Cypriots the opportunity to take advantage of their special relationship with businessmen in Turkey and the Arab world and become leading players in the very beneficial and profitable game of services.

It will provide free education in the world's best universities for the youth of Cyprus, whether Greek or Turk, and the ability to use their skills properly by participating and working in various research institutions all over Europe.

It will provide a feeling of security for all Greeks and Turks, make them self-confident and therefore more willing to cooperate with each other.

All the above arguments are today fully accepted by the overwhelming majority of the T/C who are accordingly anxious to promote a solution.

For the Greek Cypriots the accession was undoubtedly the most important event since the establishment of the Republic. For the reasons explained, for the first time since the invasion, the prospect of a solution is a realistic option. Furthermore, until the solution and the reunification of the island could become a reality, their feeling of safety and security would be dramatically improved. At long last Greek-Cypriots could sleep, knowing that the danger of a second invasion by Turkey is simply non-existent. No Turkish General could even dream of occupying further parts of a territory that is an integral part of the European Union. Greek Cypriots having at last achieved security they could now plan and build their future knowing they are safe. Because of this fact some have argued that G/C would not be interested in a solution any more. Such an argument is preposterous because whatever our achievements after 1974 the fact remains that nearly 40% of the island, which at that time accounted for more than 60% of GDP, is occupied by Turkey. By now practically in every family because of intermarriages there are refugees, and the desire to have access to your parental home or property never dies. What is more important, however, is the knowledge that the passage of time makes a solution more difficult, particularly in relation with the settlers' problem. Since we are all fully aware that neither the E.U. nor any other country will go to war over Cyprus. We understand that only through an agreement based on the United Nations proposals we can achieve reunification.

The European Union is very much interested in seeing Cyprus reunited, but the initiative for solving of the problem was left with the United Nations. The European Union limited its role to following closely the negotiations and advising the U.N. on various aspects of the solution. They fully support the basic principles and philosophy of the Annan plan and have made this abundantly clear. Greek Cypriots therefore know very well that if they want to

see their island reunited and take advantage of the E.U. membership they have to continue working for a solution based on the U.N. proposals.

Finally, we should not underestimate the continuous and strong interest of the United States. The recent letters by President Bush convey this message clearly and loudly. Therefore, the accession of Cyprus to the Union has created a new momentum which, hopefully, should lead to the solution and reunification of the island this year.

Before concluding this article, however, we need to point out that accession to the Union is also extremely important for ensuring that the Annan plan would be implemented effectively. The reason is simple. The E.U. and its institutions are the best guarantee that all Cypriots, whether G/C or T/C, will be able to live in peace together, create and take advantage of all the opportunities the E.U. offers to its citizens.

The functioning of the single market, the free movement of capital and services would ensure the economic development of the future federate T/C state. The foreign policy of Cyprus would never be a matter of friction between Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots since major decisions will be taken in Brussels and not in Cyprus. The same goes for all major economic problems and for the stability of the currency since Cyprus will shortly join the E.M.U. and adopt the Euro.

Finally, it should be pointed out that the famous stumbling block of whether the new Federal Republic is created as a result of the unification of two independent states or of the free choice of its citizens lost its significance since the Republic of Cyprus has already been accepted in the E.U. One Cyprus is now member and its development into a Federal Republic, like in the case of Belgium, is an option on the Cypriots to decide upon.