

THE SOLUTION OF THE CYPRUS PROBLEM: THE KEY TO TURKEY'S RELATIONS WITH THE EU

*The lack of trust of Turkey is the main obstacle to both the solution of the Cyprus Problem and Turkey's eventual accession to the EU. The author proposes "good will" steps Turkey can take in order to diffuse the worries, which, whether justified or not, mortgage Turkey's future.**

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* Editorial Note: Turkey does not recognize "The Republic of Cyprus"

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In December 1999 at the EU Summit in Helsinki, a decision of historic significance for Cyprus and Turkey was taken.

9. (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.

The rationale behind this decision was quite obvious. As far as Cyprus was concerned the EU member countries decided that they cannot possibly offer Turkey a second veto concerning Cyprus, i.e. to maintain the island divided by continuing to occupy with 35,000 Turkish troops nearly 37 percent of the island's territory and at the same time to essentially deny a solution by supporting the hard rejectionist policies of Mr. Denktaş. This is why it was clearly stated that they would like to see the reunification of the island before accession but if, despite their desire, this did not prove possible then the whole island would join, but the *acquis communautaire* would be implemented only in the areas controlled by the Cyprus Republic.

At the same time the Decision clearly pointed that at long last the road to EU membership for Turkey was opening. Turkey would be able to start accession negotiations if it was to convince the member countries that it had adopted the Copenhagen criteria. In paragraph 12 of the Resolution it was clearly stated that:

12. The European Council welcomes recent positive developments in Turkey as noted in the Commission's progress report, as well as its intention to continue its reforms towards complying with the Copenhagen criteria. Turkey is a candidate State destined to join the Union on the basis of the same criteria as applied to the other candidate States. Building on the existing European strategy, Turkey, like other candidate States, will benefit from a pre-accession strategy to stimulate and support its reforms. This will include enhanced political dialogue, with emphasis on progressing towards fulfilling the political criteria for accession with particular reference to the issue of human rights, as well as on the issues referred to in paragraphs 4 and 9(a).

The significance of the Decision as far as Cyprus was concerned is difficult to overestimate. It ensured that even if a solution would not be reached Cyprus could accede, something that was not at all certain until that date. Furthermore, however, Commission officials pointed out that the EU is not willing to accept the creation of two independent states. They clearly stated: “*One Cyprus and not two will be able to join the Union.*” The two communities of the island would have to agree on the elements of a solution under the auspices of the United Nations. The EU was determined not to be engaged in the efforts to find a formula for a federation.

Three years later in Copenhagen, Cyprus successfully completed the accession negotiations and was invited to join the Union. Unfortunately, however, until that moment all efforts by the United Nations to achieve a solution of the Cyprus problem had failed and thus, while the whole island of Cyprus was invited to join, the *acquis communautaire* would be implemented only in the areas controlled by the Republic of Cyprus.

The international community was not prepared to accept defeat and a new effort started to try and achieve a solution before the 1st of May 2004. These efforts led to the preparation of the Annan Plan and the referendum of April 2004. It serves no purpose to try and analyze what went wrong with the negotiations. What is important is that at the referendum while the Turkish Cypriots were able to accept with a 2/3 majority the Annan Plan, 76 percent of the Greek Cypriots rejected it. Personally, I voted ‘yes’ and campaigned for the ‘yes’, but this does not imply that the Plan was impeccable. On the contrary many of its provisions could not be considered satisfactory. Most important, however, was one underlying factor shared by practically all; the fear and lack of trust for Turkey and its motives because of the 1974 experience. People could not believe that after thirty years of occupation Turkey had suddenly abandoned its policy. They were thus convinced that not much would change, since the Plan enabled Turkey to maintain its hold on the future Turkish - Cypriot Federated State and maintain occupation troops on the island even after its accession to the EU. Further on things became worst as the Plan was considered to give the right to the Turkish army to intervene if considered necessary in the Greek Cypriot federated State. Of course the Turkish Cypriot side can argue that these fears were exaggerated but the fact remains that all the above were valid worries which led to the rejection of the Plan.

Since then, although nearly two years have gone by, there has been absolutely no move towards a solution. No sign of negotiations, not even a meeting between President Papadopoulos and Mr. Talat. The status quo remains and the dangers of the de facto partition becoming a permanent division are becoming greater day by day.

I know that many of your readers could argue that Turkey fulfilled its obligations by reversing its original claim that the 1974 invasion solved the Cyprus problem, and by accepting the Annan Plan. Therefore, the status quo could remain indefinitely. Such an approach, however, is short-sighted. It does not take into account the real interests of either Cyprus or Turkey.

The reunification of the island would benefit greatly all Cypriots and particularly the Turkish Cypriots. Tourism, off-shore activities, services, industry, agriculture will flourish only with the establishment of the federation. The standard of living will

double and triple compared to today's levels. Not only the economy but also the identity, the culture and the cohesion of the Turkish-Cypriot community will be upgraded remarkably. Cyprus will become a bridge between East and West, between Islam and the EU

The benefits for Turkey would be even greater. Turkey's national objective is to join the EU, in order to be able to fully develop its potential at home and in Europe, and ensure a peaceful and secure future. Most political forces agree with this objective and are prepared for this purpose to proceed with wide ranging reforms that will change the country radically. This national aim, however, is not a foregone conclusion. Even if Turkey implements the *acquis communautaire* successfully and its leaders create friendly relations with all EU governments, this is still not enough. It must overcome the anxieties and objections of many of the EU inhabitants and convince them that they have nothing to fear from Turkey joining. Unfortunately, Turkey may make great efforts and sacrifices in order to introduce the *acquis*. But whatever progress it achieves in economic development and the smooth functioning of a democratic system, will still not be enough to overcome the suspicions of many of the EU inhabitants today.

This is where Cyprus comes into the equation. I am convinced the solution of the Cyprus problem with the help and support of Turkey will be a decisive factor in convincing people that Turkey can be trusted; that with Turkey as a member, the Union will be disproportionately stronger.

To find a solution obviously we need to start negotiations. For the time being this looks like a very remote possibility. It is for this reason that Turkey has to take the initiative; to convey the message to Greek Cypriots, and to the world at large, that it's not only unsatisfied but also very unhappy with the prevailing stalemate. Such an initiative would involve a number of steps which could lead to a reversal of the present negative climate. Such steps could include:

- a) A statement could be issued by the Turkish government, stating that Turkey does not wish to have the right to intervene in the Greek part of the future federal republic. It is convinced that within the EU both Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots will be absolutely safe.
- b) A number of Turkish troops, between 5,000 and 10,000, could be immediately withdrawn and a road map announced leading to their complete withdrawal by the time of Turkey's accession to the EU.
- c) The bridge in Ledra Street could be built and the opening of the street to civilians could be ensured. Furthermore, the demining and the opening of several other passages could be rapidly completed.
- d) At present all churches in the occupied areas are empty and not permitted to function. However, since the movement of people on the whole island is permitted, it does not cost anything to the Turkish authorities to reopen the churches and permit liturgies taking place.
- e) Turkey favors and supports a much quicker implementation of the Annan agreement than presently envisaged in the Plan.

No guarantees can be given but initiatives, like the ones I described above, alongside the implementation of the EU Protocol, will be greeted with enthusiasm both by all

Cypriots, the EU and the UN. Negotiations will start again under the auspices of the United Nations and with good will, will quickly lead to a mutually agreed solution. As a result, the image of Turkey in the EU will substantially improve. It will convey the message that they do not wish to use their military and economic power to impose their will. On the contrary, they are interested in creating conditions of peaceful coexistence with all neighboring states and people. In such a case the strongest advocates of Turkey's accession will be the facts on the ground and all Cypriots. Turkey will not only win the battle of impressions but, more important, will secure its future accession to the Union.