

Cyprus and the European Union

Zeliha Khashman

Department of International Relations, Near East University, Lefkosa
TRNC, Mersin 10, Turkey

Abstract: In Cyprus old norms and patterns of behaviour have been replaced with new norms facilitating the possibilities for compromise and the achievement of a durable peace. Now it is the international community's duty to help to bring a just, workable and lasting settlement to the island.

Keywords: Cyprus Conflict, European Union, Membership to EU.

Introduction

It is widely acknowledged that the European Union has a prominent role to play in the future of Cyprus. The EU's involvement has been through declarations and votes in the United Nations General Assembly till 1990's. The reason for such a careful role was threefold: Firstly, both Turkey and Turkish Cypriots are unwilling to accept the EU as mediator. Secondly, the EU has to take into consideration its own interests in such a way as not to destroy its leverage on all the parties (Turkey, Greece, Turkish and Greek Cypriots) to the dispute. And thirdly, there was no common policy to be followed in Cyprus because of the member state's individual interests concerning Greece, Turkey and Cyprus.

The European Council meeting in Corfu, in 1994, was the turning point where the Council announced that the next phase of the enlargement of the union would involve Cyprus and Malta. Thus, the EU has decided to start Cyprus accession talks at the end of 1996, it meant that now they were ready to take a more active role in the Cyprus problem despite the Turkish objections. Furthermore, the EU de-linked the need for a settlement in Cyprus and accession in the Helsinki summit of December 1999.

Attitudes of Greek and Turkish Cypriots on the Membership to EU:

The Greek Cypriots believe that the accession process into European Union would act as a true catalyst for a solution of the Cyprus problem. For the Greek Cypriots this means that the EU will exert a pressure, on the Turkish side, thus the resolution of the conflict in the island will be reached in the Greek Cypriots' favour. And it is believed that a solution will be based on the EU norms and the principles (free movement, free settlement, and the right of property). The three freedoms the Greek Cypriots want for Cyprus are part of the essence of membership of the EU. Also, withdrawal of Turkish troops from the island is another priority. Greek Cypriots believe that the EU membership for the Republic of Cyprus would bring additional pressure on Turkey as they would be displayed as occupying illegally a European soil. On the other hand both the Turkish Cypriots and Turkey are willing for the Turkish Cypriots' full membership but they emphasise the resolution of the conflict before full membership to the EU. They emphasise that Cyprus is a two community island thus the Greek Cypriots are not the representatives of the Republic of Cyprus to apply on behalf of the Turkish Cypriots. Thus the Turkish Cypriot side has strongly objected the application made by the Greek Cypriot side on behalf of Cyprus. The Turkish Cypriot priorities are the continuation of Turkish security

guarantees; the achievement of political equality; continued self-determination in part of the island; and freedom of movement and of settlement and the right to property be restricted by derogations.

The different attitudes of Greek and Turkish Cypriots to the accession procedure put the EU members into a difficult situation, despite the confirmed fact that, the EU will continue the accession talks with or without the Turkish Cypriots and solution. Nevertheless, many EU countries are unwilling about a letting in a divided Cyprus. As the months for the enlargement comes nearer, where the EU must finally decide whether to open the door to a divided island or not is confronted with a dilemma. And this dilemma directly related to the positions of the motherlands of the two Cypriot communities in the island, Turkey and Greece.

Attitudes of the Motherlands on the membership:

The Cyprus issue begs the question of relations both with Turkey and Greece. Greece is already a member of the EU and has been an active advocate of the Republic of Cyprus' (only represented by the Greek Cypriots at the moment) accession. Furthermore Greece has managed to use its position to influence the EU policy towards Turkey (motherland of the Turkish Cypriots and aspiring member for full membership to EU). In 1995, Greece managed to agreeing to a date for the initiation of a accession negotiations with the Republic of Cyprus after threatening to veto the conclusion of customs union with Turkey. As a result, a package deal was negotiated. Now, Greece is threatening to veto the whole process of enlargement if Cypriot entry (even if there is no solution) is blocked. The attitude of Greece, in the coming months will be decisive not only for Cyprus membership but in the whole enlargement process.

Turkey became an associate member of the EC, applied for full membership in 1987, entered a customs union with the EU in 1996 and was given candidate status in December 1999. However, Turkey's relations with the EU are linked to their relations with Greece and their own interests in Cyprus (also loyalty to the Turkish Cypriots). Turkey announced a firm stand (annexation of North Cyprus-TRNC to Turkey) in the case of the Republic of Cyprus entry to the EU before a solution in the island. The first phase of enlargement most likely, will take place by the year 2004-5; potential members are from Central Europe and the Baltic states. It is known that whichever countries satisfy all the criteria first will get in first. By the end of 2001, Cyprus is one of those which is ahead in chapter closing. But not only they are doing their homework fast enough but as mentioned earlier, Greece is threatening to veto the whole process if

Z. Khashman: Cyprus and the European Union

Cypriot entry is blocked. Despite some of the reservations made by EU members like France and England still some states like Sweden looks insistent on the inclusion of Cyprus (before a solution in the island) in order to prevent a Greek veto against the Baltic states entry to the union. It is more likely that Cyprus will be included in the first phase of enlargement. Such a happening, will result in cooling if not all freezing of the relations between Turkey and the EU. The top ranks of the EU has to decide urgently on what to do with Cyprus as in turn raises the ultimate issue of the EU enlargement.

Ripe Moment: If the lack of ripeness is due to a preference for the status quo over any of the possible alternatives, by December 2001 this seems changing in Cyprus. In Cyprus, now the circumstances seem very conducive for negotiation process or a solution. As there is more pressure on both sides as the island approaches the deadline of EU accession. Therefore the time is ripe for a new political deal in Cyprus. A historical rapprochement between the two veteran leaders Mr. Clerides (President of the Republic of Cyprus) and Mr. Denktash (President of Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus) offers hope of a solution to the problem.

From intra national, intra regional and extra regional perspectives, the developments give the signs that the ripe moment has arrived to Cyprus for the resolution of the conflict. First of all, September 11 has created changes in international politics and order. The war on terrorism by the USA, which started with Afghanistan and the Taliban regime, seems to be continued in the Middle East. Turkey's strategic importance in the area has been emphasised once more as an important NATO and American ally after 11th of September. Under these developments, the USA seems determined to end the Cyprus dispute as the continuation of it will disturb the NATO and USA power in the region. In the case of the Republic of Cyprus entry into EU as full- member without a solution, might not only affect Turkish attitude towards the EU but also the Western clubs. This could be a loss of a big emerging market for EU and an important military ally for both NATO and EU army. As, such an enlargement, for the Turkish government and public, would confirm the idea of the EU as a 'Christian Club' where no Muslims are allowed in. Such a happening might result in revision of Turkish foreign policy and defining where the Turkish interests lie. So, the USA is aware of; the sensitivity of the problem and realises the dangers in the Eastern Mediterranean between Turkey and Greece; and the weakening of the alliance, which will fight terrorism in the Middle East. Hence, USA looks interested in helping to solve the problem with continued UN mediation.

The second reason for a positive change in the atmosphere, which brought about the ripe moment for a successful intervention by the third parties (UN, USA and EU), can be attributed to the cordial relations between Turkey and Greece. The Cyprus problem is one of the many disputes between Turkey and Greece. Relations between the two neighbors have been continuing in a honeymoon atmosphere for some time due to the efforts of their foreign ministers Mr. Papandreu (Greek) and Mr. Cem (Turkish).

Turkey, though, announced her firm stand (annexation of North Cyprus to Turkey) in the eventuality of the Republic of Cyprus' full membership to EU is still aware

that will complicate the Turkish policies domestically and internationally. Also, there had recently been some developments which, resulted in the changing attitude of Turkey over Cyprus. The European Security and Defence Policy (ESPD) has been a hindering factor between the relations of Turkey and the EU since the Helsinki Summit in December 1999. Turkey, which has been asking to take place in the decision-making mechanism of the ESPD, gave up this demand. Consequently this opened a way for a preparation of a written document where Turkey is given a guarantee that in the eruption of a conflict or war in her immediate geographic surrounding, EU army will not interfere. This new arrangement which was prepared by USA and UK on behalf of the EU was accepted by Turkey and signed on the 3rd of December 2001. The new formula for Turkey as a non-European NATO member, to a great extent solved the security concerns in the Aegean and Cyprus. Despite the fact that, Greece seems to have reservation on the new formula as a threat to their security interests. Still, this development, at once, reflected to the Cyprus problem positively.

The Greek attitude on ESPD issue will be seen more clearly in the coming weeks. But they realise the importance of their improved relations with Turkey. Although the Republic of Cyprus' entry to EU as they wish might be the desired objective of the Greek foreign policy. They know that it would be much easier if the conflict is resolved before the accession. Furthermore, the Republic of Cyprus' entry might end the hopes of a united Cyprus for good.

Of course, the most important change is the attitudes of the Turkish and Greek Cypriots on the island. Mr. Denktash who is seen as a major obstacle to change made the first move for a meeting with Mr. Clerides. So Mr. Denktash has maneuverer himself into a position where he can accede to a solution which takes into consideration of both Turkish Cypriot and Turkey's interests. Although he has been struggling for years for the recognition of TRNC (since 1983). This change in Denktash's policy came about as a result of twofold reasons: one is the realisation Turkish interest lie in the EU (both strategically and economically) and the second reason is the demand of the Turkish Cypriots for a solution and the EU membership.

On the other hand, although Greek Cypriots seems to guarantee the membership is back on the table. The reasons behind Clerides' changed attitude might be based on several reasons. First of all, although the settlement between two nations in the island is de-linked from the full membership issue, at the end this decision of the EU will be voted in all the member countries. Thus the last decision will be given by separate parliaments of 15 EU members. This puts a pressure on the Greek Cypriot government. Secondly, the belief that Europe will pressure the Turks out of their intransigence and into accepting a compromise on Cyprus (as they desire) has not been realised till today. Moreover, amongst the Arab world, there has lately been an indication that the TRNC might be recognised. Then the recognition might be followed by Pakistan, the former Soviet Muslims republics, Bangladesh, Malaysia, Indonesia. With the Muslim world on side, the USA and Israel might declare recognition. So it might be argued that there is a realisation amongst the Greek Cypriots (though not admitted officially) that entering the EU prior

Z. Khashman: Cyprus and the European Union

to a solution to the Cyprus problem will solidify the current partition of the island. At the moment the political debate on this matter has been occupying both Greek and Greek Cypriot media.

Whatever the reasons are at the moment, the parties (Turkey, Greece and Cypriots) seem to have agreed on a common bridging process to settle differences and a formula allowing for a lasting compromise and peace. Due to changed realities (EU membership and international context) a higher success from the third party intervention in Cyprus could be expected. Both sides are now more vulnerable to carrots and sticks policies than previous times. Unless they move forward and make reciprocal concessions they will face an irreversible deadlock which will not only be to the detriment of the island but also to the regions stability as well. Nevertheless, there is one important issue which remains topical and this is the question –what kind of a political settlement would be more suitable for Cyprus. The correct answer to this question can only be found by changing the continuity of certain thought structures as they hindered the radical changes necessary for the

conflict's analysis. The important thing that should be kept by the third parties in mind that the only way to help to bring peace to the island is through understanding the reasons of the problem and then make concrete proposals to that end. In that manner, a great responsibility falls to the shoulders of the third parties.

On the 4th of December 2001 Mr. Denktash and Mr. Clerides have made domestic history and taken the first step towards something far more momentous for the peoples of Cyprus, Turkey, Greece and the region. The face to face talks between the two Cypriot leaders to be continued in the coming days and months, giving hopes of a long lasting peace in the island.

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