

## **EUROPEANISATION IN CYPRUS: 'LURING' PICTURES AND 'ROUGH' REALITIES**

The accession of Cyprus to the EU was seen as the culmination of a long history of attempts to find an acceptable (to the Greek-Cypriots) solution to the political problem of the island. The 1974 Turkish invasion and subsequent occupation of the island, created for the Cypriots an exceptional security challenge, which ultimately fabricated a 'tactical' handling of the country's accession process by the Government. Entry, in other words, was essentially seen as a 'higher' political 'game', and so Europeanisation in Cyprus took on an idiosyncratic role and shaped the discourse of key actors in the process. So the application of the country for EU membership was primarily political in nature. There was a clear connection between the Cyprus problem and the approach of the country to the EU, to the extent that the two became almost synonymous.

As a result, the adjustment course took on an 'eager' and 'nationalistic' outlook (the former being of course derivative of the latter), in an attempt to accede to the ranks of the Union as early as possible. The harmonisation process, in relation to the transposition of the various directives of the *acquis communautaire*, was dominated by a conflict-free nature that would ostensibly prompt the long anticipated solution to the Cyprus problem. This was the – naïve perhaps – perception of the Cypriot actors, the elite and the wider public, who linked harmonisation, and thus accession to the EU, to the solution of the country's political problem. Clearly, the wider objectives of the Cypriot adjustment process were to achieve reunification of the island by 'playing' on the 'higher' politics field and, at the same time, to convince the other members – through a smooth adjustment path – that the country is a 'good European'. Owing to this (mis)perception, the island's division 'overshadowed' most aspects of 'traditional' politics in Cyprus. In fact, in March 1998 an 'enthusiastic' process of Europeanisation began that reached its peak on 1 May 2004, when the accession of the country to the ranks of the Union marked the end of a 'struggle' that was 'fought' upon achieving a 'national goal'.

And what of the present? What is the picture today? Is it as attractive as it was in the years preceding accession? What are the perceptions of the Cypriot people today regarding the EU? In response to these questions, I would say that people are beginning to come to grips with reality, which prompts a feeling of 'Euroscepticism' and disappointment among the Cypriot public regarding their expectations from the EU. After all, it became clear that EU membership did not provide either an 'automatic' or a 'magical' solution to our political problem. The more level-headed approach is rather that it provides a new 'platform' for negotiations. So was the EU, in the end, just a 'luring' picture of the ideal 'haven' for Cyprus? I am tempted to respond to this with an emphatic 'no!' 'No', because the EU never tried to project this picture. It was, rather, the political leadership of the country that constructed this image. It is true that the 'rough' reality for the Cypriots today is that the EU is no 'haven'; but this was a misperception to begin with. Accession and solution should never have been synonymous. And the 'rough' reality is rather that we should not lack the political philosophy to understand that.