

TURKEY'S EUROPEAN AMBITIOUS AND CYPRUS

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Repeatedly and consistently Turkish officials have put forward the view that it was a mistake for the EU to accept the Republic of Cyprus as a member without the prior resolution of the Cyprus question. This misleading point has also been supported by policy analysts who are sympathetic to this view held by Ankara. We should recall that in 1999 there was an understanding to promote the candidacy of Turkey simultaneously with the decoupling of the Cyprus problem from accession to the EU. It was expected that these two major steps would have contributed both to the resolution of the Cyprus problem as well as to the further Europeanization of Turkey. In retrospect it seems that none of the two objectives have been met. It would be interesting to assess what could have been done differently so as to have obtained better results.

Had Cyprus not been accepted to the EU because the Cyprus problem was not resolved, would have essentially amounted to giving veto power to Turkey, a third country, over the accession of Cyprus. Furthermore, Cyprus would have been punished once more for the Turkish invasion and occupation of part of its territory. In this regard such developments would have negatively affected the credibility and the image of the EU. We should also not underestimate that any future crises – over Cyprus could now be contained and managed within the Union. In any case, with Cyprus as a member of the Union the nature and the magnitude of potential “crises” have been drastically altered. This would not have been possible with Cyprus outside the Union.

Undoubtedly, following the overwhelming rejection of the Annan Plan by the Greek Cypriots on April 24 2004, the Republic of Cyprus lost, at least in the short run, its moral high ground. On

the other hand, it was overlooked that, more or less, the Annan Plan indeed legitimized the outcome of the Turkish invasion in Cyprus.

A viable solution to the Cyprus problem remains a fundamental objective of the Greek Cypriots but that does not mean the acceptance of the outcome of 1974. Indeed, the mainstream Greek-Cypriot view is that the Annan Plan primarily aimed at facilitating Turkey's European ambitions. In principle, there is nothing wrong with this policy option provided it had not stepped over the legitimate rights of Greek Cypriots. In other words, it was ascertained that the comprehensive UN plan would have had the consent of Turkey. If there was to be a NO – it should have come from the Greek-Cypriot side (as it did). Consequently, under the circumstances, the accession of Cyprus in the Union even without a solution was a second best option.

Accession negotiations between EU and Turkey started without the fulfillment of all relevant conditions despite declarations to the opposite. Cyprus aside, there are still serious deficits in Turkey concerning its adherence to the Copenhagen criteria. For example, one cannot ignore that minority rights in Turkey are in essence curtailed and that the role of the army in this country remains dominant. Inevitably these are very serious issues that must be addressed effectively. The real challenge for the EU was / is not Cyprus; it is Turkey. The manner in which the EU will handle Turkey's candidacy is significant in terms of the way the Cyprus problem may be resolved but above all it is the key to what sort of European Union we will be talking about in the years to come.