

"The Eastern Mediterranean in Perspective: the Case of Cyprus and Broader Implications"

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There is an anomaly in Cyprus which in turn creates various complications in the EU and in the Eastern Mediterranean. Further to the continuing occupation and the ethnic cleansing of Greek Cypriots, thousands of Anatolians have settled in the occupied part of Cyprus. The Turkish-Cypriot community has already become a minority in the northern part of Cyprus. This development may indeed have far reaching implications in the years to come. Furthermore, while Turkey currently talks about the "isolation of the Turkish Cypriots", it continues to block or object to the membership of the Republic of Cyprus in several European and international institutions including OECD and OSCE. In effect, Ankara does not recognize the right of the Republic of Cyprus to exist.

The last UN plan in 2004 for a solution to the Cyprus question, known as the Annan plan, was rejected overwhelmingly (75,8%) by the Greek Cypriots as it was perceived as a seriously flawed and imbalanced plan while the Turkish-Cypriot community (and the settlers) voted in favour (64,9%). In this regard, Greek Cypriots felt that the plan not only legitimized the outcome of 1974 but, moreover, would also lead to the worsening of the *status quo*. Since then, there has been a stalemate despite an agreement reached on July 8, 2006 for a road-map toward the resolution of the problem.

While Ankara and the Turkish-Cypriot leadership talk about the "isolation of the Turkish Cypriots", in effect, Turkish Cypriots do not pay taxes and dues paid by Greek-Cypriot citizens of the Republic, while they enjoy free medical services and other benefits. Furthermore, about 10.000 Turkish Cypriots work on a full or part-time basis in the government-controlled areas. To the

extent that there is isolation, this is the outcome of the Turkish occupation of the northern part of Cyprus. What is also important to note is that there is an intensification of the usurpation of Greek-Cypriot properties in the northern occupied part of the country as well as a continued influx of settlers. The 'Turkeyfication' of the northern part of Cyprus appears almost complete. And the continuing alteration of the demographic character of Cyprus will prove ominous and destabilizing.

Although it is understood that each case is different, some form of consistency is necessary to address the challenge of multiethnic societies. Ankara restricts the rights of millions of Kurds within Turkey and is threatening to invade Iraq if the Kurdish region of Iraq acquires a form of independence or autonomy. Yet, in the case of Cyprus, Ankara advances a policy of dismembering the Republic of Cyprus. This is an obvious case of double standards which entails far reaching implications.

Be that as it may, there is no doubt that the international community is in search for ways to contain ethnic conflict and also advance the peaceful coexistence of various ethnic groups. Cyprus could be a potentially unique success case provided there is an end to foreign intervention and respect for its independence and territorial integrity. The EU is also faced with a paradoxical situation: while Turkey has started accession negotiations with the Union – Ankara not only does not recognize one of its members, the Republic of Cyprus, but it also continues to occupy since 1974, 38% of the territory of this island-state.

A reunified Cyprus in which there is peaceful coexistence, democratic power-sharing on a federal basis and enjoyment of the fruits of economic growth and development by all Cypriots could lead to multidimensional positive effects. Cyprus does not wish to be a nuisance in the EU. On the contrary, it wishes to be, and is capable of being, an asset to the EU and to the international community. It should be remembered that in the Lebanese crisis in the summer of 2006, the

Republic of Cyprus played a crucial role in addressing effectively a major humanitarian crisis. Indeed, it is possible for Cyprus to play a modest but, multidimensional, role in the broader area.

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