

The Copenhagen Summit: Implications for Turkey and the Cyprus Conflict

Nathalie Tocci

At the Copenhagen Summit on 12th-13th December 2002 the European Council gave the green light to ten candidate countries to accede the Union by 1st May 2004. The enlargement package included the divided island of Cyprus. With respect to Turkey's candidacy, the fifteen converged on a variation of a Franco-German proposal, stating that if the European Council in December 2004 considers Turkey to comply with the Copenhagen criteria, Turkey would be invited to begin accession negotiations 'without delay'. As far as Turkey's own accession process, the Copenhagen decision should be considered as a crucial step bringing Turkey closer to the Union. Yet as far as expectations to reunify Cyprus prior to accession, some of the momentum generated by the UN plan in November may have been lost.

Turkey lobbied intensely to begin accession negotiations before the next enlargement in May 2004. It feared that the accession of the ten new members could introduce new obstacles in Turkey's path to the Union. Yet the EU-15's concern that a commitment on Turkey on the eve of enlargement could create tensions with the future member states was precisely why consensus was forged around a December 2004 date. This is not to say that the new members would necessarily have objections to Turkey's accession. Less still that the December 2004 date was a sinister European ploy to defer indefinitely Turkey's membership by relying on the objections of the future members, as was implied by several Turkish policy-makers and opinion-shapers. The European Council's reasoning was rather that committing EU-25 to a decision taken shortly before by EU-15 would have sent the wrong signals to the new members on the eve of effective membership.

As far as Turkey's accession process is concerned, Copenhagen should be considered a remarkable success. Consensus within the Union on the desirability of a new member state, particularly an important yet problematic applicant like Turkey, does not emerge overnight. It is a gradual process which is established and consolidated over time. The decision in Copenhagen is another crucial instance in a continuing process of consensus formation in Europe. The more Turkey progresses along this path, notwithstanding the uncertainties that remain, the more irreversible the accession process will become. Moreover, the more Ankara moves along the path of reform, spurred by Turkish public opinion and by the EU anchor, the more the reluctant voices in Europe concerning Turkey's membership will

subside. Copenhagen, like Helsinki in 1999 and unlike Luxembourg in 1997, should be hailed as another key decision in the long and tortuous road leading Turkey into Europe.

It is difficult to be equally optimistic for a Cyprus settlement. The Copenhagen summit, while admitting Cyprus to the Union, failed to witness a breakthrough in negotiations on the reunification of the divided island.

On 11th November 2002 UN Secretary General Kofi Annan presented a 137 page plan to settle the Cyprus conflict to Greek and Turkish Cypriot leaders Glafcos Clerides and Rauf Denktash, as well as to the governments of guarantor states Greece, Turkey and the UK. The plan represents the most comprehensive attempt to reach a settlement, certainly in the last decade, and probably since the 1974 division of the island. While the details of the agreement certainly require negotiation and modification by the principal parties, the general outlines of the plan fulfil the basic needs of both communities and the three guarantor states.

After long delays, the UN submitted a second version of the Plan, accounting for several objections made by the parties to the first draft. The UN and the member states hoped for an agreement on the margins of the European Council on the basis of this second document. Yet on the eve of the Copenhagen Council, chances of a breakthrough looked slim. Both parties were cautious about the compromises entailed in the Plan. The Turkish Cypriot side in particular loudly voiced its objections and was deemed responsible for the long delays in replies. The illness of Turkish Cypriot leader Rauf Denktash following heart surgery in October complicated matters further. Indeed on 12th-13th December Denktash was in hospital in Ankara rather than negotiating the reunification of the island in Copenhagen. It was unlikely that his representative Tashin Erturoglu would have signed an agreement in his place. Sadly yet predictably the Council ended without an agreement. Nonetheless, the Presidency conclusions encouraged the continuation of negotiations with the aim of reaching an agreement by the 28th February 2003.

Yet with the failure to broker a deal in Copenhagen, the chances to reach a settlement may have diminished. On 15th December the editorial in the *Cyprus Mail* posed the poignant question: 'what incentive is there now for talks?'¹

Turkey has received its 'date', which may not be as soon or as irrevocable as it would have wished it to be, but it is nonetheless a landmark decision by the fifteen that cannot be easily reversed. In the short term Turkey does not need to make painful compromises on Cyprus in order to further its own accession process. Furthermore, the remaining (albeit diminished) ambiguity concerning Turkey's future in the Union entails that Ankara will have difficulty in accepting a Cyprus

settlement in the next two months. It is fundamental to fully comprehend that all Turks (whether pro-EU or not) cannot envisage the futures of Turkey and Cyprus to be indefinitely driven apart. Many Turks accept and understand that because of Turkey's own shortcomings, Cyprus' EU membership will occur prior to Turkey's. However, they do not accept that because of allegedly unchangeable features of the Turkish state and society (such as those recently mentioned by Convention President Giscard d'Estaing), Cyprus will mark the borders of the united Europe, keeping Cyprus and Turkey on opposite sides of the European divide. Europeans may deride this position considering it to be the product of an outdated security culture. Yet regardless of any such opinions the fact remains that while pressure on Turkey and the Turkish Cypriots can and should be exerted, pressure alone will not necessarily deliver an agreement in Cyprus.

Faithful to the Helsinki conclusions, the European Council in Copenhagen admitted Cyprus to the Union without considering an agreement to be a precondition for accession. While pressure will persist, the leverage that EU member states had in Copenhagen, has been diluted. In the south, Presidential elections are scheduled for February 2002, and according to most, current President Glafcos Clerides is significantly better placed than any possible successor both to negotiate and to sign a future deal.² In addition, the majority of the Greek Cypriot public is sceptical of the current UN Plan. Although figures fluctuate constantly, as reported in the Greek Cypriot daily *Politis*, Greek Cypriot opposition to the plan stands approximately at 64%.³

However, while incentives may have diminished, an agreement before an accession treaty is signed remains possible. There are still important reasons why the parties should push for an agreement based on the UN plan. The current AKP government in Turkey appears committed to reach a solution in Cyprus and to pursue a reformist agenda. Their commitment to reform was again indicated by the government's overall positive assessments of the Copenhagen decision. Had the Turkish government not been sincere, it could have easily exploited its frustrated expectations (for an earlier and firmer date) to cool its relations with the Union. The Turkish government does not deem a non-solution to be a solution, marking a clear break with the rhetoric of former prime minister Bulent Ecevit, who considered the problem to be solved in 1974, when upon his decision, a Turkish military intervention partitioned the island in response to a Greek military coup.

The Turkish Cypriot people also desperately want a solution and have difficulty in imagining a prosperous future in northern Cyprus under a continuation of the status quo. On 29th December 30,000 Turkish Cypriots demonstrated in favour of a solution based on the UN Plan. The Turkish Cypriots understandably give precedence to security and political equality over economic prosperity. Yet the majority probably considers the UN plan as a way into the Union as political equals

to their Greek Cypriot compatriots. The Turkish Cypriot leadership has been considerably more sceptical of the Plan; but has agreed to negotiate a settlement in the coming months. Last but not least the Turkish and Turkish Cypriot leaderships may recognise that following the accession of the divided island, a future deal may well be less sensitive to Turkish and Turkish Cypriot concerns than the current UN proposal.

The Greek Cypriot leadership would also have to think twice before rejecting a solution based on the UN Plan. While from a constitutional and economic standpoint the Greek Cypriots have less to gain than the Turkish Cypriots, the UN plan foresees the return of a large portion of territory, the return of approximately 85,000 Greek Cypriot refugees under Greek Cypriot administration, a formal reunification of the island and a considerable reduction in the number of Turkish troops. The failure to deliver an agreement in the next months could result in the further entrenchment of the green-line, at least as long as Turkey itself remained outside the Union. Given the uncertainties of the future, the current Greek Cypriot leadership may deem the possible costs of non-agreement and the definite gains of an agreement to be high enough to warrant an early settlement.

Hence, the die has not yet been cast. An invaluable opportunity to clench a deal was lost in Copenhagen. Yet incentives, while having diminished may hopeful!) prove powerful enough to secure a win-win agreement in the crucial months ahead.

Notes

1. 'What incentive is there now for talks?' *Cyprus Mail*, 15 December 2002 www.cyprus-mail.com

2. At the time of writing (6 January 2003) President Clerides had decided to run for re- election with a 16-month time (sufficient to secure a settlement and effective EU membership). Clerides' decision was immediately followed by current Attorney General Markides to also run for elections. These unforeseen developments clearly impinge upon the electoral support for opponent Tassos Papadopoulos.

The results were quoted in the *Cyprus Weekly*, 'Greek Cypriot opposition to UN plan grows', 29 November 2002.