A Perilous Catalyst?
EU Accession and the Cyprus Problem

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Rethinking the Implications of EU Accession

The conflicting dynamics of Cypriot, Greek, and Turkish relations constitute part of several regional security complexes, including the Balkans, the Caucasus, and the Middle East. Clearly EU accession for Cyprus, and later for Turkey will have an impact on these regions, as well as upon the EU. Cyprus' EU accession appears to hold potential for a broader reduction of tensions in these regions, but also presents implicit problems for the coherence and integrity of the EU and its expansion. With respect to the latter, it must also be noted that within the Union there are currently several layers of disagreement about what the overall project of the EU is, and what its nature as a political organisation should be. There has been only a modicum of agreement in terms of the long-term future shape of the Union, facilitating econom- ic, social and political homogeneity, in a geographically contiguous entity. The key problem at the moment, however, lies in understanding the impact of the accession of Cyprus without a solution being in place, a development which looks likely, de- spite the recent commitment of the two Cypriot leaders to meet face to face to discussion the current situation.

The Republic of Cyprus' EU accession negotiations have made excellent progress, with 23 out of 29 chapters of the acquis preliminarily closed by December 2001, leaving Cyprus ahead of the other 11 countries with which the EU is engaged in accession talks. EU membership implies a security guarantee against Turkey for Greek Cypriots and so has led to a general consensus among all major parties in the south on EU accession. The main obstacle remains the continued division of the island, and there is clearly considerable unease among several EU member states about alienating Turkey by allowing the Republic of Cyprus to join without a prior settlement. Representatives of the European Commission and of govern- ments of EU member states have, however, continued to reiterate the decision, tak- en at the Helsinki summit in December 1999, that Cyprus' accession would not be conditional on a settlement. This has placed Turkey and the Turkish Cypriot lead- ership under great pressure, and also places a great responsibility upon the EU, should this gamble fail. The EU is also under pressure from Greece, which has threatened to veto the EU's eastward enlargement if Cyprus is not included. Thus,

it appears that Cyprus will probably be included in the next round of enlargement in 2004 and to this end, the Turkish sides, the EU and Greece are under pressure to moderate or to implement the main thrust of their respective rhetoric on the issue. The Turkish sides could find themselves further isolated and blamed for the lack of a solution in Cyprus, and the EU must deal with Turkish concerns over Cyprus' accession, while honouring its statements to the effect that Cyprus will accede no matter what happens in the negotiating process and that no non member of the EU can exercise a veto over its affairs. Greece may find tensions will escalate with Turkey if Cyprus accedes without a solution, or its entry is blocked - in which case Greece will have to decide whether to honour its stated intention to use its veto against Turkey.

All of this seems to indicate that there is significantly more chance of tension in the region escalating in the run up to the island's accession in 2004, rather than reducing, the latter of which is dependent upon a solution to the Cyprus problem, its accession, substantial progress for Turkey's desire for accession, and a continuing Greco-Turkish rapprochement. All of these prerequisites for a reduction in tensions seem to be quite unlikely. Yet EU accession has generally been put forward by politicians and analysts as a catalyst for the solution of the Cyprus problem and for the ending of Greco Turkish conflict through the adoption of a shared legal, political, economic and social framework and through joining a larger club of like minded states and peoples which would add their weight and legitimacy - not to say resources - to this end. Diplomats, advisors and civil servants from states, international and regional organisations have generally echoed this view. Yet there has been remarkably little discussion of possible scenarios if this proved not to be the case, or what might arise after the Republic of Cyprus joined the EU with or without a solution, followed later by Turkey or not, and if the conflicts between Cypriots, Greeks and Turks were merely transmuted and continued in this new forum.

The assumption on the international stage has generally been that the EU is a panacea for the conflict in the Eastern Mediterranean. This is part of a broader, liberal-internationalist vision of the international politics of peace and security in which international and regional organisations and their institutions and mechanisms provide a mediating function through which states can find compromises in their interrelationships. This dominant vision of the role of such organisations replaced the more strategic view of imperial or colonial political systems in which regional or global hegemons took control of regional politics for their own objectives, while those of the colonised were relegated. More recently, the role of the UN in Cam- bodia, Kosovo, and East Timour, among others, has illustrated a return to the politics of protectorates in which actors who could not find solutions to their own conflicts became subject to the 'mission civilisatrice' of governance by international organisations. Since 1964, the international community has taken the view that a so-

lution in Cyprus should be left for Cypriots to decide, with the assistance of the UN and within the guiding framework of UN resolutions. The addition of the EU represents a more direct attempt to bring Cyprus into the fold of regional and global consensus, though through the consent of Cypriots, Greece and Turkey.

Yet, clearly this common consent is still lacking, and the record of international or regional organisations in 'enforcing' consent upon those who block agreements has been poor, to say the least. Furthermore, there has been little questioning of the fact that common membership of NATO has not been a panacea for Greco-Turkish conflict. My point here is not to argue that this is the same as membership in the EU, or that EU accession for Cyprus may not facilitate a relaxation of tensions. Other possibilities need to be considered, however, and if possible, pre-empted. It is all too plain to those who look beyond the euphoria that goes with harmonisation and eventual accession for new members, that conflicts such as in Northern Ireland, which involves Britain and Eire, both members of the Union, over Gibraltar, which involves Britain and Spain, again both members, over Corsica, in the Basque country, and several others have, to a greater or lesser extent, survived the EU membership of its key protagonists. Indeed, one might go further and argue that solutions to similar long-standing conflicts that have been agreed on paper, for example the Good Friday Agreement, have generally not been implemented, nor have indi- . cated an 'end' to the conflict itself. Moving beyond the Union, but in regions where it has been directly or indirectly involved either as an institution, via institutional support, or the activities of individual member states and representatives, the much lauded but now probably defunct Oslo Accords, the tortuous diplomacy to bring an end to the conflict in Bosnia, and later in Kosovo (both of which only occurred after NATO applied force), indicate major flaws in the specifics behind the grand assumptions both that conflicts 'end' with settlements laid out on paper, and that membership of international or regional organisations act as panaceas.

The conflicts noted above illustrate two things: the first is that EU diplomacy has generally failed to end a conflict decisively, and secondly, that even over the longer term, as in the case of Northern Ireland, the social, economic and political conditions that the EU endeavours to facilitate can do little to make sure implementation of agreements occurs and remains consistently firm in the face of determined spoilers, nationalists and hard-liners. Thus, the key to understanding the future of the Eastern Mediterranean, along with the Balkans, the Middle East and many other regions, lies not in a staccato view of sudden alterations of local and regional dynamics via sudden changes of heart (especially if reluctantly, as would certainly be the case on the part of the Turkish and Turkish Cypriot leaderships if a pre-accession agreement were to emerge), and agreements, but (to continue the musical terminology) a slurred, slow evolution which inculcates positive change, while making costs bearable. One must also remember that despite the weaknesses inherent in

the model of regional stabilisation provided by regional organisations, the international community is showing more interest in taking responsibilit for governance in conflict zones, not least because the events of September 11 h, 2001 show that broadly speaking, long-standing conflict creates geographical and political spaces in which serious threats to the stability of the international system can emerge. This can occur both in physical terms, as in the terrorist acts in the US, but also in conceptual terms in which movements emerge that seek to challenge and undermine commonly accepted norms (it is pertinent to point out the recent and resulting shift in US foreign policy vis-a-vis the recognition of a Palestinian state, here). The Turkish Cypriot and Turkish claims for sovereignty threaten such international norms (to illustrate, recognition for the "TRNC" might have implications for the Kurds in South Eastern Turkey, which would have difficult internal ramifications for Turkey and would be seen to constitute a risk to regional stability). The failure to settle the conflict for so long may now take on much greater significance in the eyes of the international community, leading to a much more heavy handed approach to its settlement if an agreement is not found soon and with local consent. Thus, the EU does represent an excellent opportunity for a consensual solution to be found quickly for Cyprus in a framework in which all rights are guaranteed, and which can also contribute to regional stabilisation. But the opportunity exists for all both sides to accept consensually. The EU is not a panacea and cannot prevent escalation if consensus is not found. Furthermore, if the current opportunity is not taken, all parties concerned might find that the international community (or at least its dominant actors) may decide to take a much more interventionist stance in the politics of the region.

In the case of Cyprus, Greece and Turkey, what is important to consider vis-a-vis the EU, are the subtler differences that membership will make. It is also important, therefore, not to present the EU as a panacea and to accept that little may actually change in psychology or in the practical aspects of relations between Cypriots, Greeks and Turks upon EU accession - at least initially. After all, both Greece and Turkey have long been members of the UN, and of NATO; yet their relations have constantly gone through cycles of tension and rapprochement over the decades since World War Two, contained but also played out in particular in the forum that NATO provided. EU membership for Cyprus and for Turkey therefore should not be regarded as marking a major deviation of relations in the region, but instead creating opportunities for change. This is important, not merely to protect the region from local states' - and conservative protagonists' - fears of change and transition, but also the legitimacy of the EU itself. Presenting the EU accession of Cyprus as a panacea raises the problem of what this means for the Union after accession if the conflict does escalate - the analogy of UN peace operations in Somalia and Bosnia springs to mind, disasters which the UN has yet to recover from.

In the coming months it is imperative that an examination of the different scenarios of Cyprus' accession with or without a solution, followed by Turkish accession some time in the more distant future, occurs. What might this mean if decisive short term change does not occur and, as is more likely given other precedents, very little initially changes apart from the language used by the states involved and the tools they may use which impinge upon each other's interests? Frameworks, laws, and procedures may be reformed quickly, but the reconstruction of identities and policy objectives takes time – witness the gaps between the terms of the Oslo Accords and Israeli and Palestinian rhetoric years later, or similarly with the Good Friday agreements and the recent scenes involving disgruntled nationalists in Stormont. Conflicts do not merely disappear unless all parties involved commit themselves to radical changes in how they understand and react to each other. In the long term, this may occur through memberships of regional and international organisations, but in the short term those organisations become a new metaphysical battlefield in which conflicts are played out as their membership expands. One must remember that this was what the UN and the EU were envisaged to do by their founders – to contain and manage conflict between consenting members and to institutionalise approaches which lead to its eradication.

So what are the possible scenarios for the impact of the developing relationship between Cyprus and the EU on the region? In the event of the non accession of the island due to member-states' fears of the impact of this on Turkey and its response, Greece has stated it will block further EU expansion. This would have a major impact on the whole of the EU zone and doubtless be very expensive for Greece in other ways (though it might even play into EU hands if expansion debates become more fraught with controversy). However, it would also be a poor reflec- tion upon the EU, and effectively give a non-member state, Turkey, a veto over its affairs. This might place great pressure upon the Greek Cypriots to acquiesce to Turkish Cypriot demands for recognition of their self-proclaimed entity or might, given political sentiment in the south of the island, significantly reduce support for EU accession. It would also greatly increase tension between Greece and Turkey over issues such as Cyprus, but also territorial waters, continental shelf, airspace and treatment of minorities. Thus, it is very unlikely that the EU will take this risk. Essentially, it looks like not accepting Cyprus until there is a solution is more risky than accepting it without a solution in terms of maintaining regional stability.

Accession without a solution might mean that Turkey formally annexes the north and withdraws from its own EU accession process. In the short term this would not make much difference for Turkey given that its own accession is so far away, but it would displease the EU, Turkey, and the US, and would also promise the importation of the Cyprus conflict into the EU. In Cyprus this would mean that Rauf Denktash merely becomes a governor of his territory, rather than a president, with little

else actually changing. Ultimately, annexation is little more than a symbolic threat. The Greek Cypriot side would find their position much enhanced, with the umbrella of the EU both to provide nominal protection for it, and also a further legitimation of its claims to control the whole of the Republic. This would provide Greece and Cyprus with the right of *veto over* Turkish progress. Tactically, this is a poor option for both Turkey and the Turkish Cypriots. If Turkey is unable to prevent these dynamics from emerging it would weaken the Turkish government and the military and would probably strengthen the hands of the Islamicists, lurking on the fringes of the Turkish political process.

Accession with a solution would greatly enhance Turkey's chances of accession sooner and increase its influence in the EU if only indirectly through the Turkish Cypriots. It would be a major boost for both the Turkish Cypriot economy, allowing them much greater influence in European political and economic circles. It would import more resources in the conflict environment and require the EU to play a decisive role in conflict management, while also sowing the seeds of a longer term resolution of the many problems that exist. Thus Greco-Turkish disputes may continue, prompted partly by the possible employ of the double veto of Greece and Cyprus against Turkey (Greece and Cyprus officially have said they would not do so, though unofficially there are indications that this would be considered an option), and the acute likelihood of implementation problems with any Cyprus solution - as post-Cold War settlements have tended so often to suffer from.

Clearly the most dangerous option for Cyprus and for the Eastern Mediterranean is that the island does not accede. This may not only exacerbate Greece's attitude to Turkey, but it will promote an escalation of tensions and armaments on Cyprus. It will also place the EU in an ethical predicament, as it will be seen to be favouring the strategic power and resources of Turkey *over* a long standing member and an issue which has been clearly pronounced upon by the UN and the international community. For an organisation already suffering from the effects of several previous failures in its attempts to readdress regional conflict, this might seriously detract from its legitimacy. Thus, while the EU may not be a catalyst for a solution in an im-mediate sense, its presence in the region is now indispensable. The accession of Cyprus with or without a solution will be an important *move* for the EU in its attempt to develop further its conflict management role and capabilities, but it must have thought through clearly how to deal with Turkey, and with Greek nationalists in the event. Stability in the region requires that Turkey is also inextricably tied to the EU and the challenge that lies ahead is how to do this while allowing Cyprus to accede and promoting a solution, before or after, on the island. More attention needs to be devoted to these issues, to prevent them from causing any major derailment of the process of expansion itself. But it should be made clear that EU accession, while providing a viable framework for stabilising the region, increases the number of is-

sues at stake in the conflict itself and does not guarantee a solution, which still depends upon regional and local consent. If a solution does not emerge soon, however, given new international conditions all sides may find that they have far less space to manoeuvre in and that international intervention, based upon a heightened concern in the international community about the potential dangers of protracted conflict, becomes far more intrusive.