

GREEK-CYPRriot POLITICAL CULTURE AND THE PROSPECT OF EUROPEAN UNION MEMBERSHIP: A WORST-CASE SCENARIO

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Abstract

This paper argues that Cyprus' entrance into the European Union prior to a solution to the Cyprus problem may, provided that nationalism continues to be the dominant political orientation among the Greek-and/or the Turkish Cypriots, solidify the current partition of the island. This must in no way be seen as an argument against Cyprus' prospective Europeanization. On the contrary, one of the paper's main theses is that Europe can function positively vis-à-vis the social, economic and political modernization of the island.

Cyprus is characterised by a relatively underdeveloped civil society and a concomitant absence of a viable liberal ethos – an ethos that would guarantee not only "civilized" politics but also what Ernest Gellner (1994) called "the conditions of liberty". In Greek-Cypriot society, the political sphere is dominated by corporate interests providing for a clientelistic hyperpoliticization and an excessive statism.¹ As a result, Greek-Cypriot political culture creates a wide spectrum of problems whose fundamental consequence is the structural and institutional blocking of modern rational political practices and orientations. The latter would not only further the socio-economic development of the island but would also facilitate the efforts towards a solution to the Cyprus problem.

This paper examines two basic features of Greek-Cypriot political culture: first, what I call authoritarian clientelistic corporatism; and, second, nationalism. Both elements are briefly placed in the institutional and normative context of the island and the analysis focuses upon how they both affect the prospect of Cyprus' membership in the European Union, placing obstacles to Greek-Cypriot harmonisation with European norms and standards. The problems that the Greek Cypriot ethos is likely to create in Cyprus' adjustment to the political culture of the EU are already evident in how the European prospect has been handled thus far in Greek-Cypriot politics. Nonetheless, there can be no doubt that the prospect of entering the EU is

likely to serve as a catalyst which may set in motion fundamental processes of social and political transformation - as a catalyst, if you will, for social and political modernization. And one cannot overlook, of course, that EU membership will guarantee the international security of the Greek-Cypriot community. It is widely claimed, moreover, that joining the EU will also assist in achieving a political settlement of the Cyprus problem. The argument here is that Europe will pressure the Turks out of their intransigence and into accepting a compromise on Cyprus. My analysis suggests that the logic of this argument is dubious at best. One of my main propositions is that insisting upon entering the EU prior to a solution to the Cyprus problem may, provided that nationalism continues to be a dominant political orientation among the Greeks and/or the Turks of the island, solidify the current partition of the island. This is, as the subtitle of the article indicates, a provisional worst-case scenario; a projection, if you prefer, which, I must repeat, can be expected to hold if - and only if - nationalism continues to set the parameters of ideological orthodoxy and political praxis. The paper must in no way be seen as an argument against Cyprus' prospective Europeanization. On the contrary, one of its main theses is precisely that Europe can function positively vis-à-vis the social, economic and political modernization of the island. It is important to stress, moreover, that the entrance of a re-united Cyprus in the European Union will be greatly beneficial - socially, economically and politically - to the Turkish-Cypriot community as well. Rauf Denktaş's vehement opposition to Cyprus' European prospect - an opposition which appears to set him apart from a wide range of social forces in the Turkish-Cypriot community - is perhaps the strongest indication that the Turkish-Cypriot leader wishes no solution to the Cyprus problem.

Greek-Cypriot Political Culture

Let me begin with a brief account of the basic character of Greek-Cypriot political culture by discussing two key features of it, authoritarian clientelistic corporatism and nationalism. The basic consequence of these two elements is what may be called a liberal democratic deficit in Greek-Cypriot politics. Given that the European Union is fundamentally based on basic principles of liberal democracy, there can be no doubt that Greek-Cypriot political culture "suffers" from a 'European deficit.'

Authoritarian Clientelistic Corporatism

The dominance of political society over civil society is one of the key features of Greek-Cypriot society. Greek-Cypriot social life, thus, appears to be overpoliticized and is characterised by a powerful state and a personalistic political system of clientelism and patronage. In this respect, Greek-Cypriot society is very similar to Greece where, as many analysts have noted,² the state is fundamentally a mecha-

nism which promotes particularistic interests and is essentially controlled by personalistic authoritarian parties.

In conjunction with a perceived need to cope with the uncertainty and the danger posed by the Turkish invasion and occupation of 1974, the weakness of civil society gives rise to what has been aptly called the "corporatism" of Greek-Cypriot politics (Christodoulou 1992:277). The term denotes political practices which are initiated and carried out by organized groups and which avoid – to the extent, of course, that this is possible – confrontation on key social and political issues and seek to build a consensus among a wide spectrum of forces and interests.

Greek-Cypriot corporatism functions in a more general context of what we may call authoritarian politics. We may indeed talk about the absence of social criticism and about what Kitromilides (1994) calls "the defeat of liberal democracy;" and on a more general level about the weakness of civil society. The latter is, of course, the issue of the most interest to a sociologist, and it merits to be treated more systematically here. In the tradition of sociological theory, the concept of civil society points to the presence of "intermediary" structures whose primary role is to protect the individual from arbitrary and oppressive political rule. The existence of such voluntary and spontaneous institutions creates a sphere of 'free space', as it were, in which the individual can pursue his/her interests (material but also "ideal", to use Weber's term), unrestrained by any centralized agent of authority – and provided, of course, that he/she does not interfere with the well being of their fellow citizens.³ The institutions of civil society create a relatively egalitarian and tolerant milieu in which no single social group – and certainly no single individual – can dominate and submerge all others; and a milieu in which social criticism is incorporated into mainstream politics. It is precisely this tolerance that allows for individual freedom⁴.

Nationalism

With the advent of British colonialism, Greek-Cypriot irredentist nationalism, in the form of the demand for enosis (union) with Greece, began to be transformed into a mass/popular movement and to give rise to an opposing Turkish-Cypriot nationalism which essentially demanded the partition of Cyprus.⁵ The independence of 1960 was certainly an unorthodox solution to the Cyprus problem – a problem which emerged out of the clash between the two opposing nationalisms and, perhaps more importantly, the manipulation of this clash by the British administration. From 1960 to 1974, enosis continued to be the dominant Greek-Cypriot ideological orientation. In conjunction with Turkish-Cypriot nationalism, as well as the intervention of foreign interests, Greek-Cypriot nationalism fueled intercommunal strife, culminating in the Turkish invasion of 1974. As a result of the disaster of 1974, and until about the mid-1980's, Greek-Cypriot nationalism was suppressed at the expense of a different ideology that stressed "Cypriotness", as opposed to

"Greekness" and pledged support to the independence of the island. The retreat of nationalism, however, was only temporary and it soon resurfaced as a dominant ideology, albeit in a changed form—a form, it must be added, which has not yet crystallized and nor is, for that matter, clear. What Greek-Cypriot nationalists now demand is not union with Greece but the reaffirmation of Greek identity in the context of an independent polity which is organically tied to notions of Greekness and is politically anchored to the Greek state. Nationalism has again begun to define ideological orthodoxy.⁶

The "national problem" and the "national unity" that it dictates function as the common denominator of Greek-Cypriot corporatism. On a more general level, nationalism acts as the overarching emblem of the underdevelopment of civil society. The relationship between nationalism (which stresses the importance of the national over the individual) and civil society and the liberties that it entails should, I believe, be immediately obvious. The relationship can be summarized by saying that nationalism further weakens the institution of civil society – promoting, if you will, an "uncivil" society.

Greek - Cypriot Political Culture and Cyprus' Prospective Europeanization: Obstacles and Challenges

I will now discuss specific areas of Greek-Cypriot politics which appear both as obstacles to Cyprus' prospective Europeanization and as challenges for the island's modernization. I will be brief and schematic, preferring to pose some questions and raise some problematics rather than to offer any definite answers. It will be clear that the divergence from European standards constitutes both an obstacle and a challenge for the modernization of Cypriot society.

Human rights, individual liberty and the challenge of democratization

- Will it be easy for Cypriot society to adjust to European standards concerning individual liberties? See, for example, the still unresolved controversy about the decriminalization of homosexuality.
- Will Greek Orthodoxy continue to be **politically** protected at the expense of other religions?
- Will there be adequate protection of the individual from the arbitrariness of the state - be it in the form of the police or that of bureaucratic control?
- Will there be an increasing democratization of the political process?
- Will there be more room for social criticism?

- Will there be more genuine freedom of speech?

Excessive politicization and the partitocratic state

- Will the state be a relational and effective administrator of the political and economic relationship between Cyprus and the EU?
- On a more practical level, will the state be able to manage rationally EU funds and other assistance? Or, to put it conversely: Will there be a partitocratic exploitation of the benefits of Europe? Will there be an acceptance of European checks and balances?
- Will party interests stifle the development of more universalistic interest - be it in reference to Cypriot society or, more generally, greater Europe?

Identity and Nationalism

The basic question here, at least in my mind, is:

- Will EU membership solidify the current division of the island? At the same time, one may ask:
- Is there a nationalist motive behind the desire for EU membership?

There is a danger, if I may use the expression, that the Greek-Cypriots have given up on insisting upon the reunification of the island and are willing to "sell" the northern part of the island for the price of entering the European Union - a development which will certainly benefit them both economically and in the narrow political sense that the EU will provide for their security in an already divided island. My initial question may be put differently: Will the Greek-Cypriots see joining the EU as the solution to the Cyprus problem - even if it solidifies the current partition of the island?

Surveys show that fewer and fewer Greek-Cypriots view a federal solution to the Cyprus problem favorably. More than two thirds of Greek-Cypriot refugees, moreover, are not willing to return to their homes under Turkish-Cypriot authority - in the context, of a bicomunal and bizonal federation which would, theoretically at least, provide for the reunification of the island. The separation of the two communities, thus, is beginning not only to be accepted as a fact of life but also to be seen - given the current situation - as the most preferable option. This is certainly attested to by survey data, and comes out even more forcefully in qualitative and ethnographic research on Greek-Cypriot political culture and its perception of the Cyprus problem. The prevailing mood of the Greek Cypriots appears to be captured in statements to the effects that: "It is better if things stay as they are - who wants to worry

about Anatolian settlers wandering about freely among us?" or "we can do better on our own – why should we make our lives more difficult and more dangerous?"

Some more question concerning nationalism and identity:

- Will there be space for the development of a wider European identity?
- How will the Greek-Cypriots deal with the increasing demand for a commonly accepted European foreign policy?
- Would the Greek-Cypriots be able to develop a sense of European history and destiny – as opposed to their national history and destiny?

The Current Political Debate on EU Membership

To an even casual observer of Greek-Cypriot politics, it is clear that the "European prospect" largely functions as a political slogan, whose persistent users are not aware of basic facts and issues concerning Cyprus' prospective Europeanization. Europe has been one of the dominant issues in Greek-Cypriot political discourse for the last few years – at least since Cyprus' formal application for membership in July 1990. With AKEL's recent shift, the entire political spectrum views Europe favorably and supports the Republic of Cyprus' application. As is the case with so many other issues, however, there is very little of what Weber calls "substantial rationality" in the Greek-Cypriot political discourse on the EU. An even more serious problem, I repeat, may arise out of the Greek-Cypriot stress upon entering the EU independently of (and prior to) a solution to the Cyprus problem, especially if nationalism continues to be a dominant ideological force. The issue, to put it crudely, is that at least in some Greek-Cypriot circles, joining the EU may be understood as the final solution to the Cyprus problem – a solution in which the Republic of Cyprus is being transformed into a Greek (and not a Cypriot) political entity which "will live happily thereafter" in the security of the European Union. A Europeanized but divided Cyprus satisfies (even in a perverse sense) the nationalist aspiration of a purely Greek polity on the island.

The link to nationalist ideology is I think clear. Joining the EU prior to a solution to the Cyprus problem (and thus prior to the reunification, in one form or another, of the island) may be taken as a serious indication that the Greek-Cypriots and their political leadership no longer consider the reunification of the island their foremost priority – having placed their emphasis upon the creation of a Greek-Cypriot *natio-**nal*** state. In the political mainstream, the only skeptical voice concerning the possibility of joining the EU comes from AKEL which argues that the "European prospect" must concern the entire island – and by no means only the Greek Cypriots; and it must therefore be pursued only if it will contribute to the solution of the Cyprus problem and the reunification of the island. Given that until very recent-

ly AKEL was adamantly opposed to joining Europe mostly on ideological grounds (the EU being perceived as an imperialist alliance of corporate interests), the credibility of its recent shift towards "qualified" support of EU membership and the ability of the communists to influence mainstream political culture in the process of Cyprus' prospective Europeanization, are problematic.

The Challenge of Civil Society, Liberal Democracy and Modernization

The analysis of the ideological origins and evolution of modern Greek-Cypriot political culture can shed invaluable light upon the character of contemporary Greek-Cypriot politics and the role it will play in Cyprus' prospective Europeanization. On the level of philosophical analysis and the historical evolution of ideology, one may talk about the failure of the spirit of Enlightenment to transplant a viable liberal ethos which continues to lurk behind Greek-Cypriot political culture, even as we approach the twenty-first century. The failure of the Enlightenment to play a leading role in political life and thus to modernize society essentially canceled out the essence of liberal democracy.

It appears to me that the fragility of civil society in contemporary Cyprus is, more than anything else, an ideological or cultural problem. Notwithstanding its structural roots and dimension, which it would be naive to disregard, the weakness of civil society is increasingly appearing as an issue of collective consciousness and public morality. In many cases, even when the structural and institutional framework has been modernized (in the Weberian sense) and is no longer problematic, Greek-Cypriot politics carries on in ways that are anything but modern, with a clear antinomy between material development and "archaic" and slogan-ridden political thought. This, I believe, points precisely to the fact that traditional cultural orientations linger on and are independently consequential.

If the Greek Cypriots genuinely desire to be Europeanized, they must first accept that they face a significant cultural disadvantage; and they must then realize that they must not only work as Europeans but also think as Europeans. Cyprus' "European deficit", I hope this paper has established, is directly related to the weakness of civil society and the dominance of nationalist ideology. It is in light of these two crucial factors that one must be very cautious with the arguments in favor of entering the EU prior to a solution to the Cyprus problem and the assumption that Europe will pressure the Turks to compromise on a political settlement. Given that ideological orthodoxy on the island is defined by nationalism, Europe cannot take it for granted that the Greek Cypriots themselves are willing to accept such a compromise – a compromise which would most certainly involve sharing power with the Turkish Cypriots. I do not think then that Europe – or anyone else, for that matter – would attempt to impose a deal that neither of the two sides truly desires. The situation would be entirely different if the Greek-Cypriot emphasis upon the earliest possible entry into the EU, independently of the resolution of the Cyprus problem,

was not motivated by nationalist axioms; and, perhaps more importantly, if the stress on Europe coexisted with a sincere and systematic attempt at building bridges of communication with the Turkish Cypriots. The latter is absolutely essential if a viable settlement on Cyprus is ever to be achieved – and if Cyprus is to embark on a substantial process of modernization and Europeanization.

NOTES

1. This aspect of Greek-Cypriot social life has rarely been the subject of systematic analysis. Some relevant discussion can be found in Christodoulou (1992), Mavratsas (1995), Papadakis (1993), Peristianis (1995), Stamatakis (1991). The role of corporate - primarily party - interests, the clientelistic hyper-politicization and the excessive statism are issues that dominate the political discourse of ordinary people and they are often commented upon in the press.
2. On the Greek case, see Charalambis (1989), Lipovats (1995), Mouzelis (1994). On a comparative examination of Greek and Greek-Cypriot politics, see Mavratsas (1995).
3. On the Weberian concept of ideal interests, see Kalberg (1985).
4. On the concept of civil society, see Gellner (1994), Hall (1995), Keane (1988), Mouzelis (1994, 1995).
5. See Attalides (1979), Crawshaw (1978), Kitromilides (1979), Loizos (1974), Markides (1977), Patric (1989).
6. See Mavratsas (1996, 1997), Peristianis (1995), Papadakis (1993), Stamatakis (1991).

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