

Cyprus and the EU: Beyond accession

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In July 1990, Cyprus submitted its application to become a member of the European Communities (European Coal and Steel Community - ECSC, European Economic Community – EEC, and European Atomic Energy Community – EAEC). At that time, quite a few people had reservations about the prospects for a successful completion of the long trip to membership. Those reservations, which eventually proved ungrounded, had to do with the Cyprus problem which was seen as an obstacle to Cyprus's membership.

The first encouraging signs came on June 30, 1993, when the European Commission issued its *Opinion on the Application by the Republic of Cyprus for Membership*. Three months later, on October 4, the *Opinion* was adopted by the Council of Ministers and became an official policy paper. At this early stage, the EU made it clear that the geographical position and history, as well as the contemporary cultural, political, economic and social life of the Cypriot people “confer on Cyprus, beyond all doubt, its European identity and character and confirm its vocation to belong to the Community.”¹ The EU went a step further and sent a strong positive message “to the authorities and the people of Cyprus confirming that the Community considers Cyprus as eligible for membership.”² At the same time, however, concern was expressed about the *de facto* division of the island and the fact that some fundamental freedoms and rights “would have to be guaranteed as part of a comprehensive settlement restoring constitutional arrangements covering the whole of the Republic of Cyprus.”³ In an obvious effort to put pressure on the parties involved, the *Opinion* stressed that “the need to promote a political settlement is all the more paramount as the current situation would make it difficult for Cyprus to accept and implement commitments made under the European Union Treaty.”⁴

The above questions, raised in the *Opinion* ten years ago, were the focus of a protracted debate and repeated efforts to combine accession with a

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political settlement of the Cyprus question. The Council also appointed in 1994 an Observer for the Cyprus problem whose job was to follow developments and report “on the implications of political developments in Cyprus for the Union’s *acquis communautaire* including the progress of the UN’s Secretary General good offices mission for Cyprus.”⁵ One of the early conclusions drawn by Serge Abou, the European Observer, was that there was room for more active EU involvement in Cyprus. As he put it, “the EU had a special responsibility” to play a role on Cyprus and “play an active part in efforts to find a solution to the Cyprus question.”⁶

The search for a settlement has not led anywhere, although the accession process has been completed. The accession negotiations began in March 1998 and were successfully concluded in October 2002. The signing of the Accession Treaty in April 2003 was a final, collective, political and legal confirmation that Cyprus is part of the European family of nations. In May 2004, when the fifth EU enlargement materializes and the process “of an ever closer union among the peoples of Europe” enters a new stage, Cyprus may still be a divided member State. This is a paradox, if not an ironic anomaly. On the one hand, the multiethnic European continent is intensifying and expanding its unification, while, on the other hand, Cyprus, a small bicomunal island, remains divided.

It should be pointed out that besides its strong economic and European credentials, Cyprus had a rather smooth accession journey for two other interrelated reasons: First, the decision for a major EU package expansion, and second the fact that Greece was already a member of the EU and determined to fight for Cyprus’s accession all the way, even by blocking enlargement. Any complication or suspension of the enlargement was a nightmarish scenario that no one dared to think of.

Throughout the long pre-accession period, efforts to solve the Cyprus problem were made by the UN and supported by the United States and the EU. The plan submitted by the UN Secretary General, as a “Basis for a Comprehensive Settlement of the Cyprus Problem” was the most comprehensive and detailed proposal ever put on the table for a settlement on Cyprus. It was submitted in three versions on November 11 and December 10, 2002, and February 26, 2003. It was the culmination of repeated rounds of “proximity talks” and extensive consultations that begun

in 1999. In Annan's words, "[t]he level, intensity and duration of the effort of the United Nations in this period are without precedent."⁸

The Annan plan provided for special arrangements which were, in effect, linking accession with settlement. But the failure to reach a settlement on the basis of the Annan plan (especially at Copenhagen and The Hague) were not an obstacle to Cyprus's accession. Questions about the status of the Turkish occupied northern part of Cyprus were answered in a Protocol attached to the Accession Treaty which provides:

"1. The application of the *acquis* shall be suspended in those areas of the Republic of Cyprus in which the Government of the Republic of Cyprus does not exercise effective control.

2. The Council, acting unanimously on the basis of a proposal from the Commission, shall decide on the withdrawal of the suspension referred to in paragraph 1."

Today the question is not whether Cyprus will join the European Union. Following the unanimous ratification of the Accession Treaty by the Cypriot Parliament on July 14, 2003, full membership is just a matter of time. May 1, 2004, is around the corner.

Now the real question is whether there is still time and political will for another last-minute effort to reach a settlement that will allow the Turkish Cypriots to join the EU along with the Greek Cypriots in a reunited Cyprus. That is one of the major issues addressed in this special thematic issue of *Hellenic Studies/Études helléniques* that brings together a variety of approaches, new viewpoints and diverse opinions.

Evanthis Hatzivassiliou attempts to identify a European tendency in contemporary Cypriot history. Beginning with the arrival of the British in 1878 and looking at major developments ever since, he looks at the relations of Cyprus with Europe during the twentieth century. He argues persuasively that the British rule gave Cyprus and its political life a Western flavor and brought it closer to the European "liberal" world rather than the Asiatic "despotic" world. After independence, the European identity of Cyprus was further strengthened, although, for tactical reasons, the young Republic sought political support and played an important role in the Third World and the Non-Aligned Movement. Hatzivassiliou, emphasizes that despite

geographic proximity in the Middle East, Cyprus managed to stay on a European course. Consequently, the island has been well prepared politically, culturally, ideologically and economically to join the European integration process. He concludes that the accession of Cyprus to the EU can “be regarded as a long-awaited return to Europe, which additionally opens new opportunities in the search for a common future of Greek-and Turkish Cypriots.”

George Christou looks at the impact that the long Cyprus-EU relationship has had on the Cyprus problem. Although the island signed an association agreement with the EEC in 1972, it was only after 1993, when the European Commission issued its *Opinion/Avis* on Cyprus, that their relationship became politicized and took on new complexities and sensitivities. The EU tried to use the accession process as a catalyst to facilitate a settlement on the island. The main argument in Brussels was that the accession of a united island would benefit both the Greek Cypriots and the Turkish Cypriots. Greece and Turkey would also benefit greatly with the removal of the Cypriot bone of contention. The EU has been especially sensitive to Turkish European aspirations and tried to develop and enhance their relations by granting her the status of a candidate country. The EU, however, instead of having a clear and separate strategy for a settlement on the island, it has been a firm supporter of UN initiatives respecting the primacy of the UN process and framework. Christou concludes that the EU can be a major actor in the search for a settlement through the Turkish connection, especially “by drawing Turkey further into the EU structures.”

Tozun Bahcheli looks at Turkey’s European orientation and prospect for accession to the EU. In doing so, he examines the impact that the “Cyprus factor” has had on Turkey’s European course. As he points out, a settlement on Cyprus “is not a formal precondition for Turkey’s EU accession,” although there is a different view held and promoted primarily by Greece. Bahcheli provides also an overview of the Turkish policy on Cyprus, especially since 1974, and takes into account the “Denktash factor.” Apparently, the division of the island and the presence of Turkish troops on the island “ensured that Ankara and the Turkish Cypriots would have a strong hand in negotiating a new settlement that would safeguard both Turkey’s strategic interests and Turkish Cypriot security.” With regard to the search for a settlement on Cyprus, Turkey has not been enthusiastic with

third-party involvement and this has been the case especially with the EU because of Greek membership. In examining recent developments in Cyprus and EU-Turkish relations, Bahcheli concludes that the Turkish goal of accession to the EU is becoming a more and more realizable goal. There is, however, still some anxiety among the Turks “concerning the link between a Cyprus settlement and Turkey’s EU accession.”

Hasan Elmas, attempts to identify the obstacles that Turkey faces integrating Europe. He mentions difficulties related to international and regional context as well as those related to the Turkish interior politics. In doing so, he refers to the Cyprus and Kurdish issues, questions of democratization and the changing of balance with the EU, from political and demographic point of view, with the prospect of Turkey’s accession. The author also explains that after the invasion of Cyprus by the Turkish army in 1974, Turkey lost for some years interest in integrating Europe. He concludes that without a clear signal from the European countries Turkey will remain the hostage of either the military and nationalists, or of the Islamists.

Susanne M. Baier-Allen examines why the “EU factor” has not been successful in achieving a breakthrough in the search for a settlement on Cyprus before the signing of the Accession Treaty in April 2003. As she points out, during the accession process, the international community “gradually came to see that the EU could provide a conducive settlement for an overall settlement.” But, by examining the constraints that EU membership could impose on a settlement and the EU tactics used in pursuing its policy on Cyprus, Baier-Allen suggests that the constraints “are not particularly onerous” and the tactics not efficient enough in achieving the hoped for breakthrough. The EU strategy was aimed at the creation of favorable conditions of prospective winners by promoting rapprochement and confidence-building between the two communities, “selling” accession to the Turkish Cypriots and using Turkey’s bid for membership. The author argues that the EU involvement visibly empowered UN efforts, especially by generating “willingness to negotiate,” but the convergence of perspectives was not strong enough to produce results. Her conclusion is that after Cyprus’s accession, the EU can play a role by nurturing Turkey’s membership aspirations and capitalizing on the new realities that resulted from the opening of the “green line.”

Michael Tsinisizelis, Dimitris Xenakis and Dimitris Chrysochoou look at the role of the EU Hellenic presidency (first half of 2002) in promoting security dialogue in the Mediterranean. Greece held also the presidency of European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) during the Danish Presidency (second half of 2002) due to Denmark's opt-out from defence issues. Against the background of a turbulent international environment that followed the terrorist attacks against the United States on September 11, 2001, Europe, like the rest of the world, began looking at security issues with a sense of urgency. Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) became a major item on the agenda of the EU while the security and defense aspects of Euro-Mediterranean policy gained additional importance. Peace, stability and security in the Mediterranean are almost elusive as the region is especially vulnerable to changes on the international scene and the new emerging security setting. The region is also a place of distorted perceptions, misunderstandings, deep rooted conflicts and revengeful rhetoric that cannot be ignored in assessing risks and prospects for a European defense policy. The authors argue that Greece, with its firm European orientation and particular Mediterranean concerns, has been supporting and promoting a "principled" Euro-Mediterranean policy taking into account the historical and cultural context and guided by respect for international borders, democracy and human rights.

Brendan O'Duffy uses a comparative approach to examine "Cyprus through the British-Irish (Northern Ireland) prism." His assessment of empirical evidence for conflict regulation is discussed against the background of some conceptual and analytical considerations. The analysis takes into account the role of the Greek and Turkish "matro-states" and the role of other external factors such as the EU and the UN. O'Duffy stresses the significance of "mutual exchange relations" between Greece and Turkey for the promotion of a settlement on Cyprus. It is argued that Greek EU membership and Turkish candidacy have led to an asymmetrical polarization, with the EU becoming an instrument for exercising power rather than a vehicle for seeking consent for a settlement on Cyprus. The article also has a prescriptive element and suggests ways for reconciling vital opposing ethnic claims. Overall, the article attempts to make a contribution in conflict regulation theory by exploring and comparing dyadic (bicomunal) conflicts like Cyprus and Northern Ireland.

This special issue of *Hellenic Studies*/*Études helléniques* includes articles looking at Cyprus and the EU from different angles. In a way, the forthcoming accession of Cyprus to the EU has created conditions of urgency for a settlement on the island. It may also generate a momentum for a result-oriented dialogue between Greece and Turkey. The search for peace, security and stability in the eastern Mediterranean however, cannot ignore the EU principles and practices which have been shaping European integration for half a century. A solution on Cyprus, either before or after accession, cannot ignore the rationale and dynamics of European integration. Any settlement, either on the basis of the Annan Plan or on the basis of any other plan, document or set of ideas, will have to take into account the laws, rules, regulations, practices and policies on the basis of which the EU is built and functioning. In this sense, a pro-unification line of thinking in Cyprus can be more meaningful, constructive and productive. The Annan plan which gets considerable attention in this issue seems to contradict some fundamental EU principles. Quite simply, in the light of accession and in the context of European integration, it makes more sense to talk about unity and peaceful coexistence rather than antagonistic and divisive separation. To put it differently, Cyprus is too small to be divided, but big enough to accommodate its entire population under conditions of unity, peace and prosperity. We hope that the articles of this special issue can make a contribution in the debate on the future of Cyprus as an EU member state.

EDITORIAL NOTE: As a matter of editorial policy and according to the principles adopted by the United Nations, *Hellenic Studies*/*Études helléniques* uses inverted commas with “TRNC” and related terms, although some of the authors did not in their original submissions.

NOTES

1. *Commission Opinion on the Application by the Republic of Cyprus for Membership*, 30 June 1993, paragraph 44.
2. *Ibid.*, paragraph 48.

3. Ibid., paragraph 11.
4. Ibid., paragraph 22.
5. Council of General Affairs, *Conclusions*, Meeting of February 7-8, 1994.
6. *European Observer's Report on Cyprus*, paragraph 2(ii), January 23, 1995.
7. *Treaty Establishing the European Union* (Consolidated Version), Preamble.
8. UN Security Council Document S/2003/398, *Report of the Secretary General on His Mission of Good Services in Cyprus*, paragraph 145.
9. *Accession Treaty*, Protocol No 10, article 1.