

THE EU, NATO, TURKEY AND CYPRUS

Andreas Theophanous

Professor of Political Economy at the University of Nicosia and Director of the Cyprus Center for European and International Affairs

Irrespective of Cyprus, relations between the EU and Turkey constitute an extremely important theme and a critical international issue. Inevitably there are broader and deeper implications and repercussions. Cyprus comes in the equation in several ways. For example, developments revolving around Cyprus as well the attitude of Ankara toward this island-state have been affecting EU-Turkish the EU-NATO relations.

It is essential to recall that there are three philosophical approaches in relation to the potential accession of Turkey to the EU; these are:

- (a) The accession of Turkey to the EU could contribute to a better understanding between the West and the Islamic world. This could also facilitate the integration of the Moslem immigrants into European societies. Furthermore, it could ease tensions between East and West, and in addition, it could also contribute to the economic and demographic rejuvenation of the EU. Besides there have been promises and commitments to Turkey which cannot be reversed.
- (b) Turkey does not really belong to Europe politically and culturally. If Turkey accedes to the EU it could seriously challenge the identity of the EU and may compromise its ambitions as well as its political culture and, moreover, the prospects for its political integration. The EU cannot absorb Turkey. If the latter becomes a member of the Union, then the potential for political integration, even in the long run is likely to be frustrated.
- (c) It is more important to keep Turkey on the track of further modernisation and Europeanisation. The challenging question of whether Turkey should become a member of the EU does not have to be addressed today. The possibility of the Turkish accession should be kept open. If Turkey fulfils the necessary criteria it would be unfair to keep this country out. If it does not then it would be unwise to adopt a shorter yardstick in order to make Turkey a member. Under these conditions a special relationship may be discussed.

In order to understand these issues it may be essential to also assess some historical developments. Until 1997 the EU leaders viewed the Turkish application for membership negatively. The record of Turkey was such that the European leaders did not have an option but to decline. But even in 1999 when Turkey was (pre-maturely for some) accepted at the Helsinki European Council as a candidate for membership – still the record was questionable. The decision in favour of the Turkish candidacy was to a great extent the

outcome of geopolitical considerations. Indeed, the role of the US administration at the time for this decision was decisive.

Be that as it may the Helsinki decisions in relation to Cyprus, Greece and Turkey offered hope for a better future; that in one way or another the accession path/road map for Turkey would generate opportunities for the solution of the Cyprus question and the disputes in the Aegean. Eleven years later this did not materialize.

From the Greek Cypriot perspective whenever Turkey had to meet deadlines with obligations revolving around Cyprus, pressures were applied toward Nicosia to accommodate Ankara, instead of recommendations to Ankara to pursue policies conforming with the European value system and international law. This incongruous situation has eroded the faith of many Cypriots towards the EU and its partners. And although relations of Turkey with Greece have improved, several analysts argue that this has been the outcome of the "accommodation" policy of Greece. It is an undisputed fact that the fundamental Greco-Turkish problems remain unresolved.

From the perspective of Ankara it is felt that the EU is essentially discriminating against Turkey. This line of thought indicates that despite the efforts of Ankara, the EU comes up with new demands. Moreover, it is asserted that it is not the end of the world if Turkey does not become a member of the EU, with Turkish leaders becoming – sometimes rather audaciously – provocative claiming that the loss would be Europe's not Turkey's. More recently Turkey is enjoying a scope of regional influence and power. Perhaps, it is being argued, it may be better if Turkey engages in a special strategic relationship with the EU. But, according to this perspective, Turkey must decide for this, not the EU.

The above taken into account serious questions arise as to whether Turkish thinking and practices can be construed as European. To add to this several analysts throughout Europe also feel that Ankara pursues an *al a carte* policy toward the EU and the European value system. In this context is also essential to understand that bringing Turkey nearer to the EU is not the same as bringing the EU nearer to Turkey. Indeed several analysts point out that while politically the Turkish government is trying to westernize the country from a social perspective the country is easternized.

Coming back to the issue of Cyprus it should be noted that Turkish policy betrays a very un-European approach. In effect Ankara wants to dictate its terms in Cyprus; as it does not recognize the right of the Republic of Cyprus to exist it would like to promote a solution which will create a new entity – which in essence would form a protectorate of Turkey.

When Turkey invaded Cyprus it declared that "it intervened with the objective of reestablishing the constitutional order and protecting the Turkish Cypriot [minority] community". Had Turkey stopped its military operations on July 23, 1974 when the junta in Athens as well as the putschist regime in Nicosia collapsed nobody would talk about a Cyprus problem today. Instead, Turkey

continued without mercy and committed ethnic cleansing. Today it aims at legitimizing the *status quo* and its strategic control over Cyprus. This policy also entails an attempt of Turkey to change the demographic character of this island-state by sending thousands of settlers to the occupied part of Cyprus and also facilitating the transfer of thousands of illegal immigrants to the government - controlled area of the Republic of Cyprus.

When the EU decided to start accession negotiations with Turkey, it was also agreed that the Ankara Protocol would be implemented in a way that all countries, including the Republic of Cyprus, would be covered. To the present day Turkey has not implemented the Ankara Protocol and it is pursuing a policy of embargoes against the Republic of Cyprus at all levels, causing difficulties from air traffic control to complicating the EU-NATO dialogue. At the same time and in order to pervert the real picture on the island Ankara talks about "Turkish Cypriot isolation". To the extent that there is isolation of Turkish Cypriots this is the outcome of the Turkish occupation. Unfortunately, a lukewarm approach on the part of the Republic of Cyprus, which is the result of not wanting to create tensions within the EU, has allowed Turkey to move on with minimum costs and for Cyprus' national interests to remain exposed.

Besides the Ankara Protocol going back to first principles, it is an aberration that a country has started accession negotiations with the EU while at the same time it occupies a substantial part of a member state whom its right to exist it does not recognize. Consider this paradox: That Turkey demands from the Republic of Cyprus as part of the EU27 to approve the process and closure of its negotiating chapters but it does not recognize the country from which it seeks and needs that approval.

If we see the policies of Turkey in relation to its own Kurdish population, in relation to the Kurds of Iraq and the Turkish Cypriots we will see that there are great inconsistencies. The EU must stand tall in defense of its principles and advance the concept of solidarity at all levels to so as to safeguard and indeed, enhance its own credibility.

The EU-NATO impasse could be overcome if the Republic of Cyprus becomes a member of the Organization Partnership for Peace. It is expected that if the Republic of Cyprus applies Turkey would veto the process. While this is no excuse for Nicosia not to apply, it is most certainly an opportunity for its European partners to test Turkey's motives, behaviour and degree of commitment to the sphere of European solidarity in which it apparently wants to belong.