

## **PERSPECTIVES ON THE TRIANGLE EU – TURKEY AND CYPRUS: The Latest Developments**

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On October 14, 2009 the European Commission's Progress Report on Turkey described the poor record of the country in relation to several issues including Cyprus but did not make any recommendations for sanctions. It was therefore no surprise that two months later on 11 December 2009 the European Council noted the existence of the problem but did not proceed with sanctions.

Inevitably the perceived geostrategic importance of Turkey allows Ankara to pursue its own policies and to fulfil any requirements in an *a la carte* manner. The fact is that since Turkey was declared a candidate country for membership in the EU in December 1999 it continues to pursue its European ambitions despite frequent turbulences and its serious shortcomings and deficits. Turkey has never really been penalized; it has been encouraged to proceed under its own unique circumstances which are often distant if not outside the European context and its norms.

Thus it was no surprise that two days after the meeting of the European Council in December 2009 the Supreme Court of Turkey decided to close down the Democratic Social Party, the country's biggest Kurdish party; this led to days of unrest in the south-eastern provinces. It is also noted that it is no coincidence that the Supreme Court announced its decision after the meeting of the European Council.

More recently, and in relation to Cyprus, the proposals of the Turkish Cypriot side regarding issues of Governance (as approved/formulated by Ankara) confirmed the view that the Turkish policy remains unaltered: it aims at consolidating and legitimatizing the strategic control of Turkey on Cyprus. It should be stressed that these proposals are similar to the Bosnian model, the model which is under the threat of collapse. To add insult to injury the Turkish-Cypriot proposals also include the demand that the citizens of Turkey should have the right to settle, acquire property and move freely throughout Cyprus. Given that already Anatolian settlers outnumber the Turkish Cypriots in the occupied northern part of Cyprus, what does this specific proposal aim at? For several observers this proposal on its own is indicative of Turkey's designs to alter the demographic character of Cyprus.

There are at least two serious issues that are raised:

- (a) it seems that the process of the bicomunal negotiations pursued so far to resolve the Cyprus problem is inadequate and is disintegrating;
- (b) there is little doubt that Turkey proceeds with policies irrespective of whether they are in line with its European obligations or the European value system.

On the first it should be acknowledged that the problem does not only consist of the bicomunal dimension. Indeed, the major issue is that Turkey, a candidate country, does not recognize the right of a member state, the Republic of Cyprus, to exist. Can the EU continue to proceed with «business as usual» with Turkey? One would expect that the EU should at last exhibit solidarity to a member state. Repeatedly Turkish officials have stated that the EU should make its mind about what is most important: choosing to deal with 70 million Turks or with less than 1 million Greek Cypriots. Furthermore, Turkish officials also state that Turkey will not give up Cyprus in return for its own accession to the EU. What are the messages conveyed to the EU? And how does the EU respond? Should Cyprus succumb to Turkey?

On the second, undoubtedly the EU cannot and should not discriminate against any country. By the same token it would be a serious mistake for the EU to consistently ignore violations by any candidate country and proceed with the accession negotiations as if nothing is happening. At the end such an approach will set a dangerous precedent and undermine the credibility of the EU at a time when the Union has to enhance it.