

Cyprus: A Last Window of Opportunity?

Natural Gas Revives Solution Dynamic

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ABSTRACT

The basic premise of this article is that conditions have ripened for an overall settlement of the Cyprus conflict, provided a rational approach prevails in addressing the issues that still remain unresolved. The article first shows that the root of the conflict has been ethno-nationalism and the derivative concept of a nation state. Second, after demonstrating through an historical “flashback” that nationalism has led to a dead-end road in Cyprus, it presents convincing evidence that a steadily increasing number of citizens in both communities of the island are realizing the need to transcend the ethnic division and reach a federal settlement. Finally, based on policies favorable to the exploitation and transportation of hydrocarbon (i.e., the materialization of the Nabucco pipeline strategy), the article, while admitting the complexity of the situation, makes a strong point that natural gas may become a catalyst for a solution in Cyprus. Because, it would benefit all parties involved: Cyprus, Turkey, the EU and other Eastern Mediterranean countries.

As it turns out from recent relevant literature, an ever increasing number of active citizens in Turkey, Greece, and Cyprus, on both sides of the divide, are becoming aware of the dead end road of their 20th century confrontational legacy. This legacy is closely connected with an ethnocentric nationalism, which presupposed ethnically ‘pure’ nation states exclusive of any other ethnic, cultural, or religious identities.¹ As the Europeans, in the aftermath of two destructive wars, sought a new paradigm to transcend the futility of nationalism by gradually moving towards the post-modern concept of the European Union, the Helsinki accord of December 1999 marked the beginning of the historic shift from the nationalist ridden adversarial relations of Turkey, Greece, and Cyprus, towards a win-win approach and a genuine effort to peacefully settle their differences within the European framework. This process, took on a new dynamic when the AK Party

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came to power in Turkey and sent out the message of a new conciliatory approach particularly on the Cyprus problem, which, at the time, had attracted worldwide attention owing to the launch of the UN initiative in the form of the Annan Plan.

Had this initiative succeeded, it might have changed the course of history with positive spill-over effects on developments in the region. Yet, hopes have been raised recently that there is still a last window of opportunity. The problems that will arise with the threatened freezing of Turkey-EU relations during the Presidency of the European Union by the Republic of Cyprus have pushed western international actors to intensify their efforts towards finding a solution. Moreover, the opportunities to exploit natural gas and the vast profits therein, provided a settlement is achieved in Cyprus, offer strong positive incentives to both Turkey and the two communities of the island for an early solution, which would benefit all three actors.

The Background of the Cyprus Conflict

A brief retracing of the conflict in Cyprus is necessary in order that one can better understand the issues at stake today. As early as the first years of the 20th century, Greek nationalism, in the form of union (‘enosis’) with Greece, had become the mainstream political ideology of the Greek Cypriot middle class and particularly of the nascent bourgeoisie. The Turkish Cypriot community reacted promptly to enosis. Though a minority, it had a distinct sense of identity particularly as its elite had been the ruling class all through Ottoman domination and,

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until that time, had a much larger share than its numbers might suggest in the British administrative apparatus of the island. Moreover, as Ottoman rule was still a living memory, the Turkish community, in opposing enosis, demanded Cyprus’ return to its previous master in the event of a change in its status. Meantime, hav-

ing been imbued with the ideas of Young Turk nationalism, it started building up its Turkish identity, and these ideals spread from the elite to the grassroots level. When, in June 1955, Fazıl Küçük renamed his “National Party” (1944) into the “Cyprus is Turkish Party,” these competing nationalisms reached such a level of political confrontation that there was no room left for the peaceful coexistence that previously existed between the two communities. The tense political atmosphere that was created would lead to their physical separation. In addition to their respectively incompatible vision of what the future of Cyprus should look

like, the two communities were further divided by their goal of a mono-ethnic Cypriot state in which no room was left for an equal or equitable power sharing structure in what we call today a civic state.

As for how Greece and Turkey got entangled in Cyprus, historical research suggests that they were both dragged into the conflict. Post-War Greece emerged in ruins, and was pulled in unwillingly and unwittingly, one might say, by Greek Cypriot patriotic rhetoric in backing the demand to internationalize the goal of enosis. Post-War Turkey, acting on Cold War strategic considerations, could not permit Greek control in proximity of its southern ports. Furthermore, domestically it was under pressure of a resurgent nationalism and a populist Democrat Party leadership. However, Turkey came out to demand repossession of Cyprus, which a bit later it moderated to partition, only when it realized that Britain was seriously considering leaving the island, in 1955-1956, and the perceived threat of enosis became an imminent reality. Nevertheless, despite the compromise reached by Turkey and Greece in 1959, which provided for a bi-communal independent state in Cyprus precluding both enosis and partition, obsession with nationalist concepts and objectives still survived. This led to emergence of clandestine organizations in both communities of Cyprus tied to military echelons in the respective “motherland” countries. The Greek side’s goal was to promote enosis, while the Turkish side wanted partition. Once again, nation state ideologies won the day leading to the inter-communal clashes of 1963-64 and to the climax of the Greek led coup and Turkish military intervention of 1974, which de facto partitioned the island.

The Annan Initiative

Following the events of 1974, the Turkish Cypriots, having concentrated in the area occupied by the Turkish army, felt relief and security in the new state of affairs. They hoped that, by exploiting the lands and resources left behind by the Greek Cypriots, who had fled the areas occupied by the Turkish army, they would achieve the prosperity that they had been deprived of since 1964. However, Turkey’s failure to legitimize, in the eyes of international law, the gains of the 1974 war, along with mismanagement by the Denktas regime, brought a large number of Turkish Cypriots to reconsider the need for a peaceful political settlement. This position was adopted by the left of center political forces, which contested the secessionist vision of the nationalist leader Rauf Denktas, openly calling for a genuine federal model reunifying Cyprus. The appeal of such forces increased over time. In 2000, they led the Turkish Cypriots out onto the streets in a sustained struggle that culminated in 2003 with an uprising against Denktas, demanding a solution in line with the federation envisaged by the UN plan along with EU accession. It was with this frame of mind and with the encouragement

of Tayyip Erdoğan's government that the Turkish Cypriots massively supported, by of a vote of 65 per cent, the Annan Plan in April 2004.

As for the Greek Cypriots, the dream of enosis was buried in the ruins of 1974. However, not the second option of a Greek Cypriot nation state, which, in the event of reunification of the island, would be ruled by the majority community while allocating minority rights to the Turkish Cypriot community. During the long debate that ensued following the Guideline Agreement between Makarios and Denktas in 1977 for a bi-zonal bi-communal federation, two lines of thought

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emerged among the Greek Cypriots. One, led by Clerides (DISY) on the right and AKEL on the left, pursued a pragmatist approach opting for the feasible. The other, influenced and supported by the Church and led by Lyssarides (EDEK) and Kyprianou (DIKO), although paying lip service

to federation, supported the cause of a unitary nation state under Greek Cypriot majority rule. Within this political cleavage, the pragmatist political forces have always commanded a clear majority of the electoral body despite the fluctuations relating to left-right electoral antagonism. However, during the run up to the referendum on the Annan Plan in 2004, AKEL's alignment with its ruling partner Tassos Papadopoulos, the leading exponent of the rejectionist front, led to the crushing 76 per cent NO vote to the UN proposed solution.

It would certainly be a simplistic interpretation to see the result of the referendum just within this context. Apart from the decisive role-played by the political leadership and the Church, as well as by vested interests in some segments of Greek Cypriot society, along with the fear of the unknown and in some respects uncertain future, certain provisions of the plan intensified such fear and suspicion. Examining one of the most obvious one, the exceedingly long timeframe for the withdrawal of the Turkish military forces could not be legitimized in the minds of the Greek Cypriots as reasonable or necessary. Moreover, while they would immediately allow for power sharing with the Turkish Cypriots, what they would get back in return, which was territory and properties, would be gradual and slow to come, that it looked far too remote and uncertain.²

Alexis Heraclides points to the following six factors behind the Greek Cypriot NO vote:

- (a) insecurity due to Turkey and its occupying force, (b) reluctance to share power with the Turkish Cypriots, (c) unwillingness to accept political equality with the Turkish Cypriots given their percentage (18 percent) of the total popula-

tion, (d) mistrust regarding the Turkish Cypriots, (e) economic cost, and last but not least (f) Papadopoulos's seemingly compelling argument that the Republic of Cyprus once in the EU would be in a far better negotiating position to clinch a more advantageous deal.³

Nonetheless, despite these shortcomings, which related rather to psychological factors, the Annan Plan did provide for a workable federation and, for the first time, a detailed constitution applicable from the very first day of the implementation of the agreement. Moreover, positive changes in the Cyprus policy of the main external actors, that is, the US, the EU, Turkey, and Greece, along with the dramatic changes in the Turkish Cypriot community, created a unique convergence towards sustaining the implementation of the UN proposed blueprint.⁴

The Aftermath of UN Failure

The NO vote of the Greek Cypriots to the UN solution plan came as a shock to the international community and even more so to the European Union, which had invested in the long-term strategy of the Helsinki Accord and had seen the solution/accession as counterparts. Abruptly, a seemingly marginal event, had torn to pieces the Helsinki linkage architecture whereby Cyprus's accession, coupled with a solution, would accelerate Turkey's EU accession path and open the way for a settlement of the Turkish-Greek disputes. Thus, bringing stability and peace in this turbulent region and turning it from a liability into a great asset for the future of Europe. The shadow that this failure cast over the European Union's eastward policy could not have been disconnected from the rejection by French and Dutch voters in 2005 of the EU's Constitutional

Treaty. At the back of many voters' minds was the fear of further instability that the enlargement eastward could bring. Xenophobic reactions to Turkey's integration in certain European societies provoked in return nationalist resurgence in Turkey and, as a side effect, conspicuous retardation of the internal reform process.⁵ Moreover, Turkey hardened its positions with regard to normalizing its relations with the Republic of Cyprus, while the latter drifted back to its confrontational rhetoric.

Despite the failure of first-track diplomacy to reach a settlement, it seems that second-track diplomacy is noiselessly but effectively bringing together considerable segments of citizens in both of Cyprus' communities

In this climate, a rift re-emerged between Cyprus' two communities. Opinion polls conducted by the UN in both communities in early 2007 corroborated similar polls held by private social research initiatives in 2006 and the first half of 2007, which showed both Greek and Turkish Cypriots drifting back to "unitary state" and "two-state" options respectively, while in both communities hope for a solution was fading away.⁶ By that time, Turkey had no longer the same incentives and felt no pressure to push for a solution. As for the Turkish Cypriots, they no longer saw prospects for a solution. So, they turned to improving their living standards through rapid tourist developments along the northern coastline, mainly on lands that legally belonged to Greek Cypriots. Meanwhile, Tassos Papadopoulos, fearing that any new initiative for substantive negotiations would bring back the Annan Plan, refrained from any effort in this direction. Instead, he found refuge in trench warfare on legal and technical issues that tended to upgrade direct EU relations with the Turkish Cypriot community. However, he soon realized that Cyprus's EU accession had not changed in any substantive respect the balance of power, which would help him achieve a settlement on his own conditions. His political image was even more damaged, as day after day more Greek Cypriot citizens came to understand that the so called "European solution" was a fake promise, far removed from their reality. This disillusionment in fact foreshadowed his downfall in the presidential elections of 2008.

The Advent of the Left to Power

The election of AKEL General Secretary Dimitris Christofias to the presidency of the Republic of Cyprus in February 2008 was a unique development in that it was the first time the traditional left of AKEL acceded to the presidency. The platform that brought Christofias to power focused on reactivating the solution process by entering a genuine result oriented dialogue with his leftist counterpart Mehmet Ali Talat, and, as a courier of the Left's pragmatist political culture, reaching an early settlement. Their personal friendship and long standing joint commitment to a reunified federal Cyprus were the safest and best guarantees of success, provided all other factors were in place. Moreover, he had the unequivocal support of the main opposition DISY leader Nicos Anastasiades, the only political leader who had stood for YES during the 2004 referendum. The enthusiastic reception of Christofias' election by the international community and the decisive steps he took for the resumption of substantive negotiations from his very first days in power raised hopes, bringing forth a radical change in the political climate. All the opinion polls of mid-2008 showed a remarkable positive turn in the citizens' attitudes towards a federal solution as well as in their expectations. Two opinion polls, held by 'Noverna Consulting and



Photo: AA

The Republic of Cyprus should contribute towards easing tension by finding a way to safeguard that the two communities will equitably share the benefits of hydrocarbon resources.

Research' in April and July 2008 for 'Politis' daily, showed 78 and 75 per cent of the Greek Cypriots respectively endorsing Christofias's handling of the peace process. Those findings were corroborated by the fact that the two largest parties standing consistently for a federal solution (the ruling AKEL and main opposition DISY) were shown to support Christofias with 96/92 and 77/70 per cent respectively. These two parties also showed increased electoral support reaching a total of 73.4 and 72.3 per cent for April and July respectively. A third opinion poll held by 'Metron Analysis' in May 2008 for 'Alithia' daily, found a 65 per cent support-level for a reunified federal Cyprus and that an estimate of 53 per cent felt that the Christofias-Talat talks were the last chance for a solution. It also showed that AKEL and DISY commanded a total of 70 per cent of the electoral body by AKEL and DISY, and the support DISY leader Anastasiades gave to Christofias was shown to be endorsed by the 84 per cent of his party's supporters.⁷ Such evidence gave tremendous power to Christofias to reach a compromise settlement based on a bi-zonal bi-communal federation.

Only three weeks after assuming power, Christofias had his first duly prepared meeting with Talat, during which they decided, first, to set up Working Groups to prepare the ground for full-fledged talks, and, second, to open the Ledra Street crossing, which they did, to general applause, on the 3rd of April. The

two leaders had two more preparatory meetings on May 23 and July the 1st to review the work of the Working Groups and give them further guidance, and on September the 3rd they started sustained negotiations. A solution seemed within reach in a few months. Had they started the talks on the basis of the Annan Plan and improved certain drawbacks with agreed upon amendments, reaching a settlement would really have been a matter of months. However, harsh criticism by Tassos Papadopoulos, along with warnings against bringing back the Annan Plan provisions,⁸ made Christofias hold back in fear that an agreement barring provisions reminiscent of the Annan Plan might be demonized and rejected. Because the criticism was endorsed by his ruling partners, DIKO and EDEK, it made the situation worse for Christofias. However, had he been determined to strike a deal, he should have taken into account that AKEL and DISY, which commanded a clear majority of the citizen body, would adamantly support his determined approach to finding a solution. Following the criticism sparked off by Papadopoulos, the two lines of thought on the Cyprus question reappeared on the political landscape. AKEL and DISY standing for a compromise solution and DIKO and EDEK, Christofias' ruling partners, sounding off against what they saw as a comeback of the 2004 crisis. .

The Left's Failure to Deliver

In this delicate situation, Christofias had to make a crucial decision on whether to move straight on towards a solution, based on the realistic and feasible Annan Plan, by coming to an understanding with opposition leader Anastasiades or to opt for safeguarding under any circumstances his ruling alliance, thus putting off a solution. He did neither. Instead, he resorted to tactics aimed at maintaining both the solution perspective and his ruling alliance. This proved an impossible position to keep. It clearly meant both having his cake and eating it too. Absence of a clear solution strategy, on the part of Christofias, was evident from the very start of the talks when he not only rejected the Annan Plan as a basis for the negotiations –both Talat and Erdoğan had declared themselves still committed to the Plan- but he also rejected proposals by Talat, on the first topic of the agenda, the governance issue, on the ground that they were based on the Annan Plan. Talat moved promptly to the other end putting forth, as negotiating positions, hard-line proposals far beyond the Annan Plan. In order to reach common ground, talks had to start almost from scratch. Worst of all, the amicable atmosphere of the first three months was spoiled.

For the citizens, a feeling of disillusionment followed the euphoria of the first three months. People tended to think that, if the two leftist federalist leaders were that far apart there was no chance for a solution. And the nearest culprit for

the majority of Greek Cypriots and a number of Turkish Cypriot federalists was Talat with his evidently hard-line positions. The Turkish government, being perceived as the one pulling the strings behind the stage, was also a target of criticism. As for the majority of Turkish Cypriots, their frustration and distrust was directed mainly at Christofias along with the rejectionist Greek Cypriot leadership and the Church. Opinion polls held in October and November 2008 point exactly to this feeling of disillusionment and suspicion. Even though Greek Cypriot respondents continued to express positive feelings towards the Turkish Cypriots, they did not trust Talat and the rest of the Turkish Cypriot political leadership. Moreover, they did not trust at all the Turkish government. Roughly the same but rather moderate shift was found on the side of the Turkish Cypriot respondents. A negative shift also emerged in the respondents' attitude towards federation, which became again the second option to a unitary state and a two-state solution for Greek and Turkish Cypriots respectively.⁹ The atmosphere of confusion and stalemate persisted throughout 2009. An opinion poll among both Greek and Turkish Cypriots in October-November 2009 reiterated the lack of trust, mentioned above. It also showed an extremely low level of hope for a solution (15 and 16 per cent for Greek and Turkish Cypriots respectively), and a return to the former intransigent positions of a unitary state for Greek Cypriots and a two state solution for Turkish Cypriots (89 and 88 per cent respectively).¹⁰ Despite substantial convergences achieved by Christofias and Talat on governance, the economy, and EU related issues, during their intensive talks of January 2010, the climate did not change. Christofias, owing to strong reaction of his ruling partners, did not want to openly commit himself to the compromises that had been achieved. An additional reason for his negative stand in this regard was the fact that the crucial issues of territory and security, which were of special interest to the Greek Cypriot side, were still in Turkey's folders.

The failure of the left to deliver a solution, apart from being a blow to its credibility, strengthened suspicion in both communities that the real obstacle behind the scene was Turkey's unwillingness to allow for a deal on the crucial issues of territorial adjustments, return of displaced persons, guarantees, withdrawal of military forces and settlers. Moreover, the intensification of what has pointedly been described as turkification and islamization of northern Cyprus by new waves of settlers and imams, along with mainland Turkish capital taking

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control of the Turkish Cypriot economy, while indigenous Turkish Cypriots felt like they were being pushed aside, constitutes disquieting evidence in this regard. An indication of this situation is illustrated by Amanda Paul in *Today's Zaman*, Sept. 4, 2011:

Meanwhile, Turkish Cypriots are moving towards extinction on the island, being outnumbered by tens of thousands of Turkish settlers. Many Turkish Cypriots expressed deep concern over this trend, which shows no sign of stopping. While many Turks have come to work and will return, I nevertheless felt that I was, more than ever before, in a Turkish province during my time in the north. Indeed my son innocently asked the manager of a café overlooking Kyrenia harbour why there were Turkish flags flying literally everywhere. He answered by saying, "Because this is part of Turkey."

The Present Phase of the Talks

On April 18th 2010 the rightist UBP leader, Dervis Eroglu, was elected President of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus and succeeded Talat as the Turkish Cypriot negotiator. All along his pre-election campaign, Eroglu had been entrenched in the vision of a sovereign Turkish Cypriot mono-ethnic state. On his election, he said he would continue the negotiations on the basis that had already been agreed upon. However, the priority he gave to "motherland Turkey's" rights and interests, and the emphasis he placed on the thesis that nothing was considered as definitely agreed until all issues were agreed upon, set the tone of the tensions that lay ahead at the negotiating table.¹¹ From what has transpired so far, it seems that sheer distrust and absence of hope for an agreement has led the two negotiators to confine themselves to tactical moves, just to avoid bearing the brunt of a final collapse of the negotiation process. Yet, for the citizens of Cyprus as a whole, opinion poll findings show strong desire for a successful conclusion of the talks along with strong feelings of empathy, general agreement that a settlement will be economically beneficial for both communities, and a remarkable resistance of a federation as common denominator though steadily a second option since the first signs of disillusionment in late 2008.¹²

It is a misfortune that, at a time when a rationally thinking social center was breaking new ground in both communities, the controversy that ensued over the drilling by the Republic of Cyprus for natural gas in its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of Eastern Mediterranean raised tensions again. In addition, the harsh positions taken by Prime Minister Erdoğan on the territorial issue during his visit to northern Cyprus on the 20th of July 2011, and the threatening style of his speech at the UN General Assembly on the 22nd of September 2011, have

strengthened fears among large segments of the Greek Cypriot community that Turkey does not really want a solution on Cyprus.

The Natural Gas Dynamic

In fact, Turkey's incentives for solution have been diminished compared to 2004. After all, Turkey can live with it, most analysts say, no matter whether it is clearly perceived as a liability, "a stone in his shoe," said Abdullah Gul. There has been insistent speculation that, apart from focusing on other priorities, Turkey wants to keep Cyprus as a trump card in its final bargain for EU accession if and when this comes. However, regardless of such speculations, any rational analysis of Turkey's interests, which are served better through Ahmet Davutoglu's doctrine of "zero problems with neighbors," leads unavoidably to a peaceful negotiated settlement, which would usher in a new era of friendship and cooperation.

Moreover, recent developments related to natural gas reserves in the Eastern Mediterranean region and their exploitation perspectives bring the Cyprus solution back into focus. The discovery of energy resources in the area might be a blessing or a curse depending on the path developments will take. As the scope of this article is to serve the cause of peace, it will leave aside possible negative scenarios and elaborate on ones that lead to peace, which after all are the options of any rational approach. In terms of cool rational thinking, the hydrocarbon perspective may bring the two communities of Cyprus and Turkey together in fruitful cooperation that would benefit all. Two key issues are interlinked in this analysis: the solution of the Cyprus problem and the materialization of the Nabucco Strategy.

In studying the stacks of relevant literature, one can sketch out three possible scenarios in relation to the possibility of natural gas exportation from the eastern Mediterranean basin to Europe. The first is to export it by sea in liquid form. This presupposes liquidization installations at the country of origin and deliquidization installations at the country of destination in Europe. This method, first, cannot manage large quantities and, second, raises production cost. A second scenario provides for building a pipe system from the gas fields to southern Cyprus, thence to the island of Rhodes, and thence to Europe through mainland Greece. This scenario stumbles because of the depth of the seas between Cyprus and Rhodes, the risks of a possible disaster owing to seismic activity of the

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seabed in question, and the extremely high cost to build it, not accounting for political complications as it will pass through Turkey's EEZ. A third scenario provides for a pipe system from the gas fields to the Karpas peninsula in eastern Cyprus, thence to Ceyhan in southern Turkey (shallow waters all along this route make the project feasible), and thence to Europe through the Nabucco pipeline. This scenario, the most fitting one, revitalizes the Nabucco strategy, which has been stalled for the last two years owing to inadequate gas supplies to justify its construction. Provided the vast quantities of the Eastern Mediterranean reserves are directed to Nabucco, its building becomes both feasible and profitable, and EU countries reduce their heavy dependence on Russia, which at present amounts to 41 per cent. As Turkey will be a vital link in this strategy, it will decisively strengthen its appeal to become a full member and a key player in the European Union. For such a grand scale strategy to materialize, certain political preconditions are required. The first and foremost one is the solution of the Cyprus problem and the establishment of cooperative relations of a unified federal Cyprus with Turkey. In addition, as the gas supplies of Israel and Egypt would add decisively to the project's feasibility and viability, improvement of Turkish-Israeli relations would greatly facilitate the overall enterprise.

The situation on the ground is certainly much more complex than the one portrayed in the above description. It is difficult to grasp the subtle interplay of interests of the big western powers and Russia in the region. The way most of them have recently tried to make their presence felt is amply indicative of the underlying antagonism. Drawing on historical experience, a political analyst might safely conclude that the interests of the big powers involved meet at safeguarding the independence of Cyprus. This does not make Cyprus a regional player any-

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way. The one thing that Cyprus can –and has to– do is to avoid becoming the pawn of any one. If Cyprus abides by this principle and stands firm in its mission as a European Union outpost, it will serve both its long- term interests and the interests of peace and stability in the region. This hails back

to the need of establishing and maintaining cooperative relations with Turkey and its other neighbors on the eastern Mediterranean coasts. Here again, a peaceful settlement of the Cyprus problem is a sine qua non condition.

There has been some speculation about an Israeli-Cyprus-Greece axis against Turkey on the basis of natural gas exploitation. However, it has no basis in reality. Statements made in this regard by Israel's President Simon Peres and Israel's Deputy Foreign Minister Danny Ayalon during their visits to Cyprus and Athens

respectively, in November 2011, made it more than clear that Israel's furthering of cooperation with Cyprus and Greece is not directed against any one else. Cyprus should consistently move in this direction, even in the present non-solution conditions, in relation to the options it has to take on energy infrastructure. Any options in this respect should be compatible with EU broader strategies along with an amicable solution strategy as well. The Republic of Cyprus should also contribute towards easing tension by finding a way to safeguard that the two communities will equitably share the benefits of hydrocarbon resources. The Norwegian model might be a useful tool if properly treated to meet the needs of the particular case.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The swings in public opinion, as shown from the opinion polls cited or referred to above, are indicative of the "swings in hope" and interpretation of reality. Three noteworthy elements are revealed in these public opinion surveys. First, when, in early 2008, interpretation of reality raised hopes for a solution, a federal solution had a strong appeal for both Greek and Turkish Cypriots. Second, even when hopes for a solution faded, the federal idea still survives as a prevalent second option, that is, as a common denominator in both communities. Third, despite the failure of first-track diplomacy to reach a settlement, it seems that second-track diplomacy is noiseless-

As for Turkey, the question is still up in the air whether the Erdoğan government will stand by its public commitments and demonstrate that it has the political will to reach a solution right now

ly but effectively bringing together considerable segments of rationally thinking citizens in both of Cyprus' communities, who are becoming active in civil society organizations and thereby are increasing their influence in society at large. Voices being raised by public intellectuals in Turkey suggesting a rational approach towards a peaceful settlement are further broadening the scope of second-track diplomacy. To the extent that such trends becoming influential social currents, they may transform adversarial characteristics of the Cyprus conflict into consensual ones, and the so far zero sum approach into a win-win one. One drawback in this regard is that such social transformations can be too slow in catching up with rapidly shifting realities.

In conflict resolution terms, all parties involved in a dispute should have a mind set conducive towards a settlement in order to have a successful peace process. In 2004, the missing link was, no doubt, the Greek Cypriot commu-

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nity, which was misled by a nationalist leadership, on the one hand, and a shortsighted one, on the other. As the vast majority of citizens could not fully comprehend a complex legal document as the Annan Plan, when asked to take a stand on it they turned to the policy making leadership, and more so to the party leaders they trusted more for guidance. Christofias may have miscalculated priorities during his two-year talks with Talat.

However, now that his rejectionist ruling partners have left him and the 7-eleven explosion¹³ has blown up any meager chances he had for a second term, the only success he may leave to posterity is a settlement of the Cyprus conflict. The possible complications in the natural gas drilling enterprise, without a solution, constitute an additional strong incentive for him to do his best for a settlement. Moreover, the understanding he has reached with Anastasiades in addressing the economic problems is a quite telling paradigm for a similar understanding in addressing Cyprus's political imbroglio. Eroglu has not convinced the objective observer, so far, that he is genuinely interested in a settlement. As for the real key player, Turkey, the question is still up in the air whether the Erdoğan government will stand by its public commitments and demonstrate that it has the political will to reach a solution right now. And the one way to show such readiness is to take a stand conducive to a settlement on the crucial issues relating to security and territory, which have not been touched upon at the negotiating table so far. In practical terms, it might be easier for such a step to be taken in a broadened negotiation process in which, apart from the two communities, key players such as Turkey, Greece, the EU, and the UN participate. It might be rightly argued that such a final stage to convene needs serious preparation and strong indications for success. It is the role of diplomacy to find the right channels through which to safeguard the necessary preconditions.

One last recommendation that might help towards a viable settlement on the thorny issues of territory and property is for the negotiators to consider establishing what Vural & Peristianis describe as "Sub-Regions," and what a proposal by the Cyprus Academic Dialogue calls "Unrestricted Relocation Areas."¹⁴ These proposals, while safeguarding for the Turkish Cypriot community a clear majority of population and property ownership in the area under its administration, provide for the possibility of interaction among citizens of the two communities, thus preempting ethno-national or territorial polarization in a bi-zonal settlement.

Conditions have really ripened for a peaceful negotiated settlement. On strategic considerations, a demilitarized federal Cyprus would under no circumstances be a threat of any kind to Turkey. For Cyprus' citizens, one can observe that considerable segments of society are moving from the adversarial notions of unitary or separate sovereignty towards the empathizing notion of shared sovereignty, from the nationalist obsession with majoritarian democracy towards the post-nationalist idea of consociational democracy, from the conservative narrow minded concepts of an ethno-cultural mono-ethnic state towards the progressive open minded concept of a multi-cultural civic state.¹⁵ A spark of hope is desperately needed to turn this silent but salient rationally thinking social center in both communities into a vocal majority current that will help the two communities transcend obsessions with the past and make the leap into a common future.

To many political analysts, it seems to be a last window of opportunity. In the event the parties involved open the window, they set in motion a process that will turn the East Mediterranean basin into a region of stability, peace, and prosperity. If they fail to grasp this opportunity, Greek and Turkish Cypriots will be the first victims. But there will be a series of negative chain effects the reverberations of which will certainly be felt by Ankara, Athens, and Brussels.

Endnotes

1. See, Harry Anastasiou, *The Broken Olive Branch* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2008), Volume one, *The Impasse of Ethnonationalism*.

2. See: Chrysostomos Pericleous, "The Turkish Internal Reform and Foreign Policy Shift: Implications for the Cyprus Talks," *Policy Brief, Global Political Trends Center (GPoT)*, No. 24, (June 2011).

3. See: Alexis Heraclides, "The Cyprus Gordian Knot: An Intractable Ethnic Conflict," *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, Vol. 17: 2, (2011), pp. 117-139 (Online publication date: 08 June 2011, access: 24.06.2011).

4. For a detailed presentation and analysis of the UN initiative leading up to the referendum, see: Chrysostomos Pericleous, *The Cyprus Referendum: A Divided Island and the challenge of the Annan Plan*, (London, I.B. Tauris, 2009).

5. See accordingly: European Commission: *Turkey: 2005 Progress Report*, 9 Nov. 2005: pp. 10-42, and Turkey: *2006 Progress Report*, 8 Nov. 2006: pp. 5-25.

6. For detailed data, see: Pericleous, *The Cyprus Referendum: A Divided Island and the challenge of the Annan Plan*, pp. 328-329.

7. See: Dionysis Dionysiou, "President Strengthened by AKEL and DISY," *Politis*, May 4, 2008 and Dionysis Dionysiou, "Full Support to Direct Talks," *Politis*, July 27, 2008. See also: Giorgos Kallinikou, "We Say YES to Sense of Responsibility," *Alithia*, May 31, 2008.

8. See: Papadopoulos' interview with Andreas Pimbishis, "Tassos on all Issues" ("O Tassos e' olis tis ilis"), *Fileleftheros*, June 1&2, 2008.

9. See: (1) Lefteris Adilinis, "Findings of Public Opinion Research by Centre for European Policy Studies: Rapprochement Culture Necessary", *Politis*, October 31, 2008, (2) Dionysis Dionysiou, "Opinion Poll by Noverna Consulting & Research for Politis: YES to Christofias Confusion on the Cyprus problem," *Politis*, November 2, 2008; (3) Nicos Prokommenos, "Opinion Poll by Metron Analysis: Disappointment: Cypriots see deadlock in Talks," *Alithia*, November 9, 2008.

10. The poll was held by Symmetron Market Research for Greek Cypriots and KADEM Cyprus Social Research for Turkish Cypriots on behalf of “Interpeace: Cyprus 2015,” between 6 October and 6 November 2009.

11. *Bayrak Television*, April 18, 2010.

12. See: Opinion polls held by Symmetron Market Research for Greek Cypriots and KADEM Cyprus Social Research for Turkish Cypriots on behalf of “Interpeace: Cyprus 2015,” in September 2010 and March-April 2011.

13. The explosion of July 11, 2011 at the marine base on the southern coasts of Cyprus, which destroyed the main power station cost the lives of 13 people.

14. See: Yücel Vural & Nicos Peristianis, “Beyond Ethno-nationalism: Emerging trends in Cypriot Politics after the Annan Plan,” *Nations and Nationalism*, vol. 14, p. 57. See also: Cyprus Academic Dialogue, “Proposal on the Property Issue,” submitted to the negotiators, the UNSG’s Special Adviser and the EU Representation in Cyprus, February 2011 (It will shortly be on the CAD’s website).

15. For an elaborated discussion of these ideas, see: Yücel Vural & Nicos Peristianis, “Beyond Ethno-nationalism: Emerging trends in Cypriot Politics after the Annan Plan,” *Nations and Nationalism*, vol. 14, pp. 39-60.

1st Middle East International Congress: New Politics and Society in the Middle East

Sakarya University, Institute of Social Sciences

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- Islam and Society: the rise of new Islamic movements, social Islam and political Islam
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