

Cypriot Membership and The EU Domestic Disquiets: An Ancillary Obstacle for Turkey's Candidacy

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Abstract

As dusk fell on 30th April 2004, the people of Greek Cypriot administration or Republic of Cyprus (RoC) began beatific chortle waiting for the day ahead, the day that has been wished many years back. The island become a new member of the EU on 1st May 2004, likewise Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia. The Turkey Cypriot administration or Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) remained out of the engagement until today. The EU enlargement in terms of admitting RoC to the bloc adds more complexity to the already Cypriot longstanding vendetta; it therefore invites much tension on Turkey's side. Turkey has applied for the Union's membership long time ago. The decision of the Union on whether or not to consider the Turkey's bidding delays. Many experts adduce that the entrance of predominant Muslim country, but regional power and strategic nation like Turkey into the organization seldom win popularity among EU-group of nations. The Cyprus is an island comprises of two communities those independently epitomize the two countries surround them. Greek Cypriots who identify themselves as Orthodox Christians and adopt Greek language as Lingua Franca on one side, and Turkish Cypriots claim Islam as their religion, and use Turkish as main language of communication within their boundaries on the other.

Keywords: Cyprus, Turkey-EU Accession, Greece-Turkey relations, EU Membership, Violence and Partition

1. INTRODUCTION

Nearly three centuries back since the island, known Cyprus today had been annexed by authority of the Ottoman Empire. Eventually, with pass of the time, and emergence of factual evolvement of changes; attentions and interests of many countries mostly European powers, acted as they were bulwarking against what could disturb the island. Greece (formerly Greek) and Turkey had ever being considered among the global powers for many centuries. That because of the gigantic contribution they offered for the human civilizations and developments over centuries. Each of Greece and Turkey maintains distinctive policies towards the island. However, the EU perspective on Cyprus, especially during the pre-admission period, seemed very much in accord with the condition of Greece on the undecided Cypriot territory. Cyprus, the biggest island and the second conflict zone only to the Arab-Israel in the Mediterranean, had undergone different occupations by various civilizations and Empires circa 707 B.C. to 1571 AD. The Ottoman and British Empires reached the agreement that the British should ally with the Ottoman against the Russian interest in the Turkey's eastern region. This pact led to the transition of Cypriot administration to Britain in 1878 (Yilmaz, 2010).

Since that time until 1960 when the Cyprus attained independence, Britain had been able to maintain its influence regardless with the demand from the Greek Cypriots of unity with the Kingdom of Greek, even though the unity was not much welcomed by the Greek palace. Simultaneously, the British had embraced the idea very lately. That was only after the Ottoman Empire engaged in the First World War (Bostanci, 2014). Parenthetically, the Cypriot membership to EU amid the longstanding conflict of interest between Greek, a member-country

in the EU and Turkey, which is still battling to secure a seat in the Union, causes and paves the way for more uncertainty both in the future of the island and the fate of the Turkey's application. During the accession negotiations, both EU and Greek seemed to ignore or did not put into consideration the force of the Treaty of Guarantee undertaken by RoC. Despite a decade of Greek Cypriots struggle to ensure unitary government in the territory, the goal could not be achieved followed by the Turkish military support and ensured the TRNC between 1974 and 1983 (Yilmaz, 2010).

Additionally, the sluggish motion of the EU to reach the conclusion on Turkey's application as integral part of the Union is categorically observed from various directions. Historically, Turkey happened to be the power-house of Islam during the Ottoman Empire, which had traditionally and conversely stood as antonymous to Christendom European states. This corresponds with the Hurds (2008) argument who pointed out that the Turkey's membership is remotely seldom simply because the reasons such as Turkey's democratization failure, ethical barrier between EU community and Turkey coupled with the border wondering, are very much strong to support the impossibility of the Turkey's proposed marriage with the Union. Nevertheless, for Turkey to get accession to the regional group of 27 (until now), addition to the standard conditionality, it is now needs to recognise the legal existence of the RoC as independent state and member of the EU. As far as Turkey is concerned, this is elusively infeasible specifically when the TRNC issue get into consideration. In fact, Turkey refused to comply with the custom union leading to the opening of sea and airports for the RoC (Basturk, 2011).

Geographical location and military capacity continue to actualize the importance of Turkey in the European zone. Some scholars, like Aghsan pointed out that Turkey remains as tube of energy transition to Europe between the Middle East, Caucasus and Russian Federation (Aghsan, 2011). Nevertheless, Turkey is also crossroads of many new energy transportation projects launched recently so that EU could meet its 70 percent energy importation requirements by 2030 (Kadir, 2010). Turkey is the second largest serving army in North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) coalition. This means, the security requirements remain intact in Europe as longer as Turkey's position in NATO remains the same.

Here come the debates whether or not Turkey should be granted the access to the organization. Some see that there is always need of Turkey as integral part in the bloc especially after 9/11 attacks and other subsequent events in the Balkans, Caucasus, Mediterranean, etc. Fighting terrorism in South of the Mediterranean, Caucasus, and nearby surrounding areas cannot be possible without Turkey's collaboration (Oguzlu, 2007). Although fighting an epidemic proportions such as terrorism could be short or long term engagement as it can also take another direction beyond the current prediction. Secondly, accommodating predominant Muslim country in the secular democratic group of nations could weaken domestic political stability of Turkey itself. Perhaps, this is preceding expectation, which could affect the spinal cord of the EU and lead it either to drop Turkey or bestir itself in a costly engagement.

2. SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This paper aims at examining whether EU's disquiets on the Cypriot issue are the same concerns cause delay in considering Turkey's membership in the union. Nevertheless, the study will testify the heavy weight perspectives of EU toward the 2002, 2007 and the recent 2018 elections won by the Islamist *Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi* (AKP) in Turkey. The study answers the question that *why* Muslim dominant countries with political as well as economic importance in the region are not yet up to the level of accession the membership of the Union. Significantly, this work is based on the contributions to bring new phase and perspectives on the Turkey-EU relations (EU-Turkey as European country or EU-Turkey as Middle/Near Eastern nation). This means that the study adds in the existing literature like never before. Meanwhile, apart from the Cypriot admittance to EU, which is considered (hypothesized) as an extra-obstacle for Turkey; the research however, considers the current Cypriot-EU-Turkey supple diplomatic duelling on *culturalism* and ethical

barrier rather than on geographical demarcation or economic policy and democracy alone especially on the current administration of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.

More than one decade passed since Cypriot joined the EU bloc, and hence many literatures try to locate legitimacy/illegitimacy of the RoC admission into the union within domestic and international legal documents. Most of them were able to propose explanation on the current display of their studies but conclusion remains very much perplex. In terms of the Union membership, the Turkey's status remains the same many years before. Apart from Turkey, there are other two countries: Bosnia and Kosovo who are also dominant Muslim nations but have no border question like Turkey. They are put on the status of "potential candidature". Fate of these two nations would help in determining the hiding implication of Turkey-EU relations as far as membership is concerned. However, the study puts into consideration whether or not mistrust of the regional society toward Turkey especially after RoC entry into the Union could be another obstacle on Turkey's proposal. Bosnia and Kosovo are other Muslim dominant European nations (potential candidates) with less strategic importance compared to Turkey;

3. METHODOLOGY

The study relied on analytical and descriptive approaches. Various books, journals and research reports are consulted as sources of information. Current political events in the Mediterranean and in Euro-zone were also being followed in various websites, and the data collected is examined, clarified and analysed theme by theme. Though I don't speak Turkish, but fluent in English and Arabic languages, and thus followed up past and current events in neighbouring Arab nations i.e. Syria, Jordan and Lebanon. However, even though England branched out of the regional body (EU), English remains official and working language in the organization. This research depended on the existing sources and much clarification of up to date publications that gauged which theories carry more weight and support the hypotheses of this study. Senior scholars on Islam and politics have constantly been consulted to help in shaping the hypotheses and explanations.

4. CYPRUS, THE BIGGEST ISLAND IN THE MEDITERRANEAN: AN OVERVIEW

The Republic of Cyprus (RoC), is a former British colony, attained independence on 1st October, 1960. That was the last freedom this island ever achieved throughout its long history and circumstantial chronology. Simultaneously, this freedom (political independence) serves as another breakthrough in facing the other side of reality that has to do with both regional and international politics. This island comprises 'Republic of Cyprus' or Greek Cypriot led-administration and the 'Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus' (TRNC) or Turkish Cypriot led-administration. RoC claims the entire island and pretends as it represents the total land size and populations during its application for accession to the EU membership in 1990. This move was promptly denied by the TRNC, and thus the application as well as the subsequent accession remain additional factors of the intra-island riven attitudes

Geographical demarcation places this island within the space of 3572 square miles, approximately. To the south, it borders Turkey; Greek to the southeast, Egypt to the north and Syria to the west. The island has population of about 1,266,676 (CIA, July, 2020) that makes her the 157th populous area in the world. From the 2nd Millennium BC down to the 20th century in the 1914, Cyprus underwent several invasions, controls and occupations by different powers including those were from the nearby areas such as Assyrians, Egyptians, Ottoman Empire and Persians, as well as those from Europe such as Roman Empire, and lately Britain, which granted independence to the island in 1960 following both political and revolutionary violence led by then Cypriot nationalists in the 1950s.

The Cypriot bishop of Kyrenia (promoted to Archbishop) Makarios III and Michael Mouskos had ideally contrived plan for self-determination against British rule. Apropos campaign and advocacy in favour of *enosis* (union) with what Greek-Cypriots consider “mother Greece”, the UK felt that it was the time to grant independence to the island after being under its protectorate ratified during the Cyprus Convention of 1878. The island was then annexed by the British in the 1914 and recognized by Turkey itself following the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923. The proponents of *enosis* in the Cyprus challenged the sovereign rule of the British over the island after dislodging her control from Egypt hoping it to be an antecedent prelude to reassess the British stance in the island (Calvocoressi, 2005). The long-standing agitation was not from an essence of *enosis*, as it was not also fascinatingly welcomed choice than the self-governing, but the least alternative available, therein.

The Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC); recognized only by Turkey, has around 18 percent of the total population. During the 1950s, when the riots and violence over the issue of freedom went round, Turkey coincidentally moved to adopt new policy of partition so that the island could be divided instead of allowing Cypriots pursuing union with Greece. Though the Turkish prime concern was essentially total annexation simply because the island was part of Anatolia, which makes up the majority of mainstream modern day Turkey, and more or so extended to occupy western part of the Arabian Peninsula. From the other side, Greek Cypriot that occupied nearly 60 percent of the total land area with some 70 percent of the population is Greek by language and Orthodox Church by religion. This has traditionally make it perplexed for Turkey to win a support from Cypriots or even by the International community.

During the 1950s, Cyprus was forced to boggle at a time when it was really questing for a quick and proper recovery from different invasions, and thus to the freedom and sovereignty. Some three different plans were proposed to shape the future Cyprus. All of them couldn't unanimously won felicitous apposite acceptability of the two governments, Greek and Turkey. The first proposed plan favoured self-determination that should, conditionally be given to the island after a decade of self-governing. This proposal was brought about by Eden, and rejected by the Turkish authorities, instantly. The second proposed plan overwrite self-determination and replaced it with more elaborated content of negotiation that was partition of the island. The principle proponent of this arrangement was Judge, Lord Radcliffe of England, and the plan was instantaneously rejected by the Greek government. Thirdly, Turkish government emboldened to suggest that the approbation it needed was acquiescence to annex the island to the former Ottoman power-house, compared to *enosis* supported by the Greeks (Calvocoressi, 2005).

Religious dogmatism, ethical values, traditional and cultural adherences are perpetually playing undeniable, but chancy role in prolonging the strife and conflict in the island. It is a passive attack and a deterrence between Turkish Muslims and Greek Christians. Notwithstanding some economic hard-luck story in the recent past, Greece remains important member in the EU and politically significant in the region. Likewise, Turkey has been for so long, a strategic partner for EU with excellent diplomatic relations with many regional individual nations, such as Bulgaria, Romania, so forth. Militarily, Turkey is so much relevant, especially for the eastern part of the Europe.

5. CYPRUS, A STANDING PRECLUTION TO TURKISH-EU CONNECTION?

Cyprus, the third smallest member-country in the EU after Malta and Luxembourg, has been in soft war with Turkey – often through Greece – for so many years ago. After several ups and downs, Cyprus was granted accession to EU in 2004, after a long gap since when the island dropped her application to the Union for consideration. As usual, at the international level of analysis, anarchism champions world affairs. According to realist traditional approach, ‘*might*’ always determines wrong and right, not norms or even morality. Hence, for the survival of

Cypriots, the government of the island is expected to behave in a way that could paralyse Turkey. This is the 'law of the jungle'. Jennifer Rankin and Patrick Wintour (2020) added that the island decries lack of concern shows by the union by refusing to levy punishment against Turkey as it did with Belarus (Rankin and Wintour, 2020).

Cyprus concern was on the recently risen tension in the eastern part of the Mediterranean. Turkish authorities declare that there will be no retreat on their decision that contains expansion towards the area, which is the source of the ongoing potential crisis between Turkey and Greece. The Turkish recent move galvanizes tensions, and seems to capture the attention of international community. Hence, with the inevitable implication, the Union, as the situation might be, should remain in support of the Greek government. Already Cyprus kicked, stepping up her effort to ensure that EU launch a sanction against Turkey over what it sees as act of aggression. Likewise, on the comparative contrast, both Cyprus and Greece may generate obstacle for Turkey's candidacy in the bloc during decision session of the Union on the fate of the candidate.

In spite of her long periodic relations with EU, Turkey has passively been a victim of her poor relation with neighbouring Greece and wrangling status with Cyprus. Turkey-EU relations record a handsome beginning, when it joined the Council of Europe in 1949. However, after the collapse of Ottoman Empire, Mustafa Kemal Atatuk, a revolutionary figure, transformed the old-Islamic home empire into modern day Turkey. Nonetheless, Atatuk brought about some series of many reforms that helped in transforming the country to look the way its today. As far as the antique history of Islam in Turkey is concerned, westernization as well as secularization are among the most controversial reforms introduced by Atatuk in many centuries. Between 1959 and 1990s, Turkey submitted different applications, signed different agreements including Ankara Agreement that tried integrating Turkey into the Custom Union of European Economic Community. Turkey has finally, submitted her formal application for accession to what was then European Economic Community somewhere in December 1987.

Even though the eventual membership of Turkey was then confirmed in 1989 through a respond sent by European Commission, but it was simultaneously cited that the time was not conducive to take the negotiation further due to the Turkish economic and political situations those were facing troubling atmosphere.

However, the periodic tensions with Greece and Cyprus remain an ancillary obstacle for Turkey's accession simply because the membership negotiation with new incoming country cannot start until all of the member countries agree through a unanimous decision by the Council of the union (EU Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, 2009). More or so, the Cyprus's insisting demand on similar action against Turkey on one hand, and on the other the Turkey-Greece dispute over Turkish exploration in Oruc Reis near the water that was already declared by the United Nations Law of the Sea as Greek water. This unstable situation can't anyway attract agreement from the two EU member states.

6. CONCLUSION

In this paper I try to highlight that possibility or impossibility of the Turkey's accession to EU. The argument was that with the given historic conflict based on the socio-cultural basis, Cyprus will be additional heavyweight on Turkey in terms of EU membership. It might be a historic turbulent should a majority Muslim nation like Turkey access membership into an economically strongest regional union with no Muslim nation yet. Turkey will be the populous member-country in case her bidding is being granted. The second largest army in NATO and strategic partner with other non-member European countries.

These important factors could be in a positive side for the union, but with regard to the Cyprus and Greece, Turkey's entrance might be a nightmare. Parenthetically, Turkey is excellently

important in both economy and regional security; NATO is a clear example. In a state of dilemma, EU must put into consideration unionism that justifies backing Greece or other vital interests that can be realized only through normalizing relations with Turkey.

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