

Turkey's EU Candidacy Process and Prospects for Democratic Settlement of the Cyprus Issue

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Abstract

This paper analyzes the impact of Turkey's EU candidacy process on Turkish foreign policy towards Cyprus. In doing that it focuses on the impact of the EU's political conditionality on Turkey's Cyprus policy through the lenses of the Europeanization approach to foreign-policy change. The main argument of the paper is that even though Turkey's foreign-policy objective with regard to Cyprus has not substantially been transformed, the policy strategies, tools and opportunity structures of foreign-policy makers have considerably altered along Turkey's process of Europeanization. The paper, therefore, explores the policy change and continuity in terms of three major historical turning points in Turkey-EU relations in order to analyze the extent to which Turkey's Cyprus policy was influenced by the EU. These turning points are the post-Helsinki period (1999-2002), the process of accession negotiations (2002-2006), and the post-December 2006, the European Commission's Regular Report on Turkey. In all these periods, the resolution of the Cyprus conflict remained a major foreign-policy challenge for Turkey-EU relations. However, it is evident that Turkey's policy responses to the EU's political conditionality concerning Cyprus have significantly been transformed through Turkey's process of Europeanization, which spans the period from 1999 to 2008.

Key words: Europeanization, Turkey's EU Candidacy, Cyprus Policy

Özet

Bu çalışma, Türkiye'nin AB'ye adaylık sürecinin Türkiye'nin Kıbrıs sorununa yönelik dış politikasına olan etkisini analiz etmektedir. Bunu yaparken, Avrupalasma yaklaşımının neden olduđu dış politika deđişimi aracılığı ile AB'nin politik şartlılığının Türkiye'nin Kıbrıs politikasına olan etkisine odaklanmaktadır. Bu çalışmanın temel amacı, Türkiye'nin Kıbrıs'a yönelik dış politika hedefleri, tam olarak dönüşmemiş olsa da dış politika yapıcılarının politika stratejileri, araçları ve fırsat yapıları, Türkiye'nin Avrupalasma süreci boyunca önemli ölçüde deđişmiştir savını öne sürmektedir. Bu bağlamda bu

makale, AB'nin Türkiye'nin Kıbrıs politikasını hangi ölçüde değiştirdiğini analiz etmek için Türkiye-AB ilişkilerinin geçtiği üç dönüm noktası çerçevesindeki politika değişimi ve sürekliliğini ele almaktadır. İncelenecek olan dönüm noktaları, Helsinki sonrası (1999-2002) dönem, katılım müzakereleri süreci (2002-2006) ve Avrupa Komisyonu'nun Aralık 2006 İlerleme Raporu sonrası dönemlerdir. Bütün bu dönemlerde Kıbrıs sorunu, AB Türkiye ilişkileri açısından önemli bir dış politika kısıtı olarak kendini göstermiştir. Ancak, AB'nin Kıbrıs'a yönelik politik şartlılığına Türkiye'nin yanıtı, Türkiye'nin 1999'dan günümüze uzanan Avrupalaşma süreci boyunca gözle görülür bir şekilde değişmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Avrupalaşma, Türkiye'nin AB Adaylığı, Kıbrıs Politikası

Introduction: Tracing the EU's Influence on Turkish Foreign-Policy Change towards Cyprus

In March 2008, the peace talks were re-launched by the Greek and Turkish Cypriot leaders, Mehmet Ali Talat and Demetris Christofias, to resolve the power sharing disputes that constitute the core of the Cyprus problem. Currently, the talks continue under the moderation of the United Nations (UN). The Foreign Minister of the Republic of Turkey, Ali Babacan, declared that “Turkey’s policy towards Cyprus has not changed, and is ready to support the democratic settlement of the conflict on the condition of recognition of equal status of the both founding states.”¹ This implies the support of the Turkish government for any agreement guaranteeing the sovereign rights of the both communities, the existence of two democracies, and, at best, the acknowledgement of Turkey as the guarantor of the rights of Turkish Cypriots. This is an important turning point for the Cyprus question since there is an ever further emphasis by Turkey, especially since March 2004 referendum, on the centrality of establishing an official agreement between the two Cypriot communities for the resolution of the nearly half century-long conflict over the rights of both communities on the island. What has remained constant in Turkish foreign policy is the objective of achieving the international recognition of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC).

In this context, understanding the factors behind the increasing support for a democratic settlement of the Cyprus conflict, which is becoming the core rhetoric of Turkish foreign-policy makers, deserves further analysis. One of the major reasons for this drastic shift in the foreign policy strategy of Turkey can fairly be attributed to this country’s political will to become a full member of the European Union (EU).

Recent scholarly work on Cyprus focuses on the impact of the EU and its enlargement policy on the settlement of the conflict, and explores the “EU’s external capabilities and enlargement as a conflict resolution tool.”² Since the ‘Republic of Cyprus’ – as only represented by Greek Cypriots - became a full member of the EU on 1 May 2004, the increasing role played by the EU with regard to solving the conflict affects Turkey-EU relations deeply. Additionally, Turkey’s EU candidacy process, among other domestic and international factors, significantly impacts Turkey’s foreign policy strategies towards the Cyprus.

The Europeanization process, which should be understood as the EU’s impact on the domestic and foreign policies of candidate states, has become an integral part of Turkey’s institutional reforms towards meeting the political conditionality for membership since the 1999 Helsinki summit in which Turkey was granted official candidate status. Since then, the EU’s impact has been more visible in Turkey’s foreign policy agenda. The Europeanization of foreign policy does not necessarily imply a change in the substance of the policy subject matter. It can also lead to structural changes in policy-making styles, policy strategies, tools, and opportunity structures of foreign-policy actors along the process of alignment with the EU’s common foreign policy guidelines.³ Turkey’s political objective of becoming a EU member and the Union’s provision of a clearer membership perspective are major motivations behind its foreign policy alignment according to the EU’s common foreign policies and policy guidelines. A very recent Report of the European Commission (November 5, 2008) contains mostly positive evaluations on “Turkey’s broad alignment with common foreign and security policy (CFSP) statements, declarations, and demarches.” According to the Report, “in 2008, Turkey aligned itself with 109 out of 124 CFSP declarations.” However, in the same report, the European Commission also states that:

External Relations is one of the eight chapters covered by the conclusions on Turkey adopted by the Council (General Affairs and External Relations) on 11 December 2006 and endorsed by the European Council on 14/15 December 2006. As long as restrictions remain in place on the free movement of goods carried by vessels and aircraft registered in Cyprus or where the last port of call was Cyprus, Turkey will not be in a position fully to implement the *acquis* relating to this chapter.⁴

During Turkey's candidacy process, from 1999 onwards, the peaceful resolution of the Cyprus issue has remained one of the most controversial foreign policy matters on the agenda of Turkey-EU relations, because it directly involves the immediate foreign and security concerns of both actors. The EU's political concerns derive especially from the concerns of the two member states, Greece and Cyprus. Additionally, the geopolitical importance of Cyprus within the context of the political stability in the Mediterranean region makes the resolution of the conflict essential for European common foreign, security and defense policy objectives.

At the present stage, the course that the conflict over Cyprus would take remains one of the important factors that could either facilitate or hinder Turkey's accession talks with the EU. However, this paper argues that the resolution of the problem is highly dependent on the achievement of a democratic settlement of the Cyprus talks, which would satisfy the demands of the both Cypriot communities. One of the major reasons for this is that the EU granted full membership status to the Republic of Cyprus without waiting for a durable agreement to be reached. In this way, it has partially lost ground as an international actor that could mediate a peaceful settlement between Turkish and Greek Cypriots. The following sections of this paper aim at elaborating on this argument through an analysis of the reasons behind the transformations of the Turkish foreign policy strategies, tools and opportunity structures in the name of resolving the Cyprus debacle.

1999-2002 EU's Post-Helsinki Summit Developments: Turkey's EU Candidacy Process and the Questioning of Whether Cyprus Should be a Pre-Condition for Full Membership

In the post-Helsinki period, Cyprus remained a top foreign and security policy on the agenda of Turkey, the EU, and Greece. Greece's security concerns center on the potential threat of Turkey's total domination over the island, and the country's foreign policy preference is the unification of Cyprus under Greek Cypriot rule.⁵ In historical perspective, the Cyprus problem is based on the conflict between the two Cypriot communities. It goes back to the 1960s when the London-Zurich accords that created the 'Republic of Cyprus' based on the principal of political equality of the two communities were breached as the result of a political crisis between the Greek and the Turkish Cypriots and the subsequent mounting

violence on the island.⁶ The events resulted in the division of the island between the Greek Cypriot administration, internationally recognized, and the later founded TRNC, recognized only by the Republic of Turkey. Since then, the recognition of the sovereignty rights of both Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots has remained a central problem preventing a permanent and coherent resolution of the issue within the context of Turkey's EU candidature. Additionally, the military buildup, and policies of deterrence, in both the northern and southern parts of Cyprus also pose a serious security concern for the parts involved in the conflict. Turkey's official position asserts that unless the international recognition of the political rights of the TRNC as representing the Turkish Cypriots has been achieved, Turkey would neither recognize the southern Cyprus administration nor, under the Customs Union Agreement, lift the trade barriers against the 'Republic of Cyprus'. From the 1970s to present, the resolution of the conflict on Cyprus has been predominantly led under the moderation of United Nations (UN), which prepared numerous plans to satisfy the demands of both Cypriot communities, yet an enduring consensus has not been reached.⁷

Against this historical background, the EU's policy guidelines on the Cyprus issue remain highly contested within the context of Turkey's accession negotiations process. First of all, back in December 1999, in the Helsinki Summit, the EU decided to include the 'Republic of Cyprus' –as only represented by the Greek Cypriot community- in the forthcoming wave of enlargement and by doing this, gave up on the leverage of conditionality suggesting that the Cyprus's membership could only be finalized under the condition of the political settlement of the Cyprus problem.⁸ Secondly, at the European Council Helsinki Summit, the settlement of the Cyprus issue had not been officially set as a precondition for Turkey's accession negotiations. It should here be stressed that there are two major aspects of the EU's political conditionality concerning alignment with common foreign, security and defense policies that are directly related with Cyprus, and they became quite visible from the late 1999 onwards. First of all, the European Commission Regular Report on Turkey stated back in October 1999 that:

[w]ith resolution 1250 on June 29, the Security Council requests the UN Secretary-General to invite the Greek and Turkish Cypriot leaders to hold negotiations in the autumn. It also calls

on the two sides on Cyprus, including military authorities, to work constructively with the Secretary-General and his special representative to create a positive climate on the island that will pave the way for these negotiations ... Turkey as a guarantor country, should show strong commitment to bring the two sides together under the UN process launched at the invitation of the G8. Turkey could have an active and constructive role in this framework in order to reach a comprehensive solution that addresses the legitimate concerns of all parties.⁹

Therefore, from 1999 onwards, the EU has put much emphasis on the centrality of the principle that Turkey should support the UN efforts to reconcile the territorial disputes over sovereignty rights of the Cypriot communities. The other integral part of Turkey's alignment with the EU's foreign, security and defense policies has been treated as a short-term priority in the Accession Partnership Document (2001). In this respect, Turkey should,

[i]n accordance with the Helsinki conclusions, in the context of the political dialogue, strongly support the UN Secretary General's efforts to bring to a successful conclusion the process of finding a comprehensive settlement of the Cyprus problem, as referred to in point 9(a) of the Helsinki conclusions.¹⁰

In historical perspective, successive Turkish governments and state officials, in their policy rhetoric, had rather stressed the centrality of resolving the Cyprus problem within the framework of Turkey's security and defense policy concerns.¹¹ Under the 1999-2002 coalition government of the Democratic Left Party, Nationalist Action Party and the Motherland Party, the Cyprus issue continued to dominate the security policy agenda of Turkey. On July 20 1999, the then president of TRNC Rauf Denktaş and Turkey's prime minister Bülent Ecevit declared that Turkey and the North of Cyprus were in the course of assessing the possibility of developing their relations "in line with the target of integration set at the highest level," to be deployed as a policy tool against the isolation of the TRNC by the international community.¹² Turkey's policy rhetoric in this phase underlined that the best policy option to resolve the problem was the recognition of TRNC by the

international community. The Turkish concerns revolved around the centrality of the geostrategic location of the island and the protection of the political rights of Turkish Cypriots. On November 11 2000, Ecevit declared that “the security of TRNC and the Republic of Turkey, and that of Eastern Mediterranean cannot be thought separately.”¹³ Ecevit’s policy discourse also put forward the points that Turkey could not accept the settlement of the Cyprus issue as a precondition for its adhesion to the EU, and that without the recognition of the presence of two equally sovereign states on the island, a resolution was almost unachievable. Therefore, in the post-Helsinki period, Turkey’s foreign policy strategy and rhetoric on the settlement of the Cyprus problem were shaped by the relative importance given to the geostrategic significance and security interests of Turkey in the Mediterranean region.

It is also important to emphasize that between 1999 and 2002, the coalition government led by Ecevit simultaneously supported the UN efforts to bring a comprehensive settlement to the Cyprus problem that would satisfy both the Turkish and Greek Cypriots. According to the 2001 Turkish National Program for the Adoption of the Acquis (NPAA) Turkey should be understood as

a country that contributes to the enhancement and reinforcement of peace, security, stability and prosperity in international relations and will continue to develop her relations with neighboring countries on the basis of a peace-seeking foreign policy. In this context, Turkey will continue to undertake initiatives and efforts towards the settlement of bilateral problems with Greece through dialogue; support the efforts of the UN Secretary General, in the context of establishing a new partnership in Cyprus based on the sovereign equality of the two parties and realities on the island.¹⁴

Nevertheless, at this point one should remember that although justifications for Turkey’s Cyprus policy objectives were rather defined through a security rhetoric at that time, the then Foreign Minister, İsmail Cem made considerable efforts towards deepening the economic cooperation and political dialogue between Greece and Turkey.¹⁵ Measures towards confidence building between the two Aegean countries became an integral part of the governmental, state and foreign policy of

Turkey from this period onwards.¹⁶ This step could also be considered as the motor of a rejuvenated foreign policy towards deepening the bilateral relations between Greece and Turkey that would eventually, and hopefully, lead to enhance the political dialogue between Turkey and Greece over finding a resolution to the Cyprus problem.

Despite the UN efforts and the Turkish-Greek confidence-building measures, in the post-Helsinki period, the Cyprus issue remained unsolved. The centrality of the geostrategic location of Cyprus in the eyes of both Greece and Turkey and the EU's decision to admit Cyprus to the EU on 1 May 2004 have, unfortunately, led the efforts to resolve the debacle to an impasse.¹⁷ Nonetheless, the EU's provision setting a clear membership perspective (2002-2006) for Turkey by spelling out a concrete date for the accession negotiations has served as a major factor that contributed to the deepening of the effects of Europeanization in the Turkish foreign policy. During this period, important policy initiatives taken by the Turkish government, notably the Justice and Development Party (JDP), in support of the UN plan designed for resolving the Cyprus conflict, made a novel impact on the issue. The reassessed objectives of Turkey were stated in the revised version of the NPAA (2003), which put forward the Turkish agenda for domestic institutional reforms and foreign policy alignment with the EU.

Turkey's EU Accession Negotiations Process (2002-2006): Cyprus Problem Revisited

On 13 December 2002, the Copenhagen European Council concluded that "if in December 2004 the European Council, based upon the report and recommendation of the European Commission, decides that Turkey sufficiently fulfills the Copenhagen political criteria", the Union would "open accession negotiations without delay."¹⁸ This statement pointed to the launch of a major incentive in support of Turkey's alignment process with EU norms and policies. The European Council's resolutions, in 2003, on Turkey's accession negotiations reinforced the credibility of the EU's enlargement strategy and provided justification to the new Turkish government's reformist policy rhetoric. The JDP government, elected on 3 November 2002, and the Republican People's Party, the main opposition party in the Turkish Parliament, passed major EU harmonization reforms between 2003 and 2006. This period, therefore, witnessed considerable progress in the alignment of Turkey's foreign

policy structures with the EU's common foreign, security and defense policy structures. However, the Cyprus issue remained as a major foreign policy challenge for Turkey during the process of accession negotiations. Furthermore, in relation to the enlargement policy, there had been a reluctance, on the EU's part, to continue to dwell on the prolonged Cyprus dispute to the extent that it had been challenging the supranational efforts of enhancing the EU's security strategy.¹⁹

It wouldn't be wrong to suggest that in the name of reaching a peaceful settlement on Cyprus, the EU's policy strategy has functioned to push for foreign-policy change in Turkey through the tools of the enlargement policy. The goal of peaceful settlement of the Cyprus dispute accordingly appeared in all of the relevant EU official reports on Turkey from 2002 to 2006.²⁰ What is striking is that the impact of the EU's policy strategy has been clearly felt on Turkey's current accession negotiations process, and bilateral relations with the EU member states. The Accession Partnership document (2003) states that Turkey, as a short-term priority, should

in the context of the political dialogue, strongly support efforts to find a comprehensive settlement of the Cyprus problem, through the continuation of the United Nations Secretary General's mission of good offices and of negotiations on the basis of its proposals.²¹

In addition to the revised version of the Accession Partnership documents, in November 2003, the European Commission in its Regular Report on Turkey clearly stated that the absence of a comprehensive settlement of the Cyprus problem between the two communities "could become a serious obstacle to Turkey's EU aspirations." Therefore, the Report emphasized that "Turkey should provide determined support for efforts to achieve a comprehensive settlement of the Cyprus problem."²²

In Turkey's foreign policy rhetoric in the period of 2003-2006 regarding the Cyprus issue, a clear shift from prioritizing security to prioritizing democratic settlement took place. The year following the European Council resolution of December 2002, the revised version of the NPAA (2003) clearly stressed that

as part of the enhanced political dialogue, Turkey will continue to support the efforts of the United Nations Secretary General in his good offices mission aimed at a mutually acceptable settlement, with a view to establishing a new partnership in Cyprus, based on the sovereign equality of the two parties and the realities of the Island. Turkey supports the steps taken by the Turkish Cypriot side, which will foster an environment of confidence and pave the way for a comprehensive solution.²³

Accordingly, finding a peaceful settlement that champions both Cypriot communities will inevitably give priority to the security and defense considerations. Yet, despite some reservations of the main opposition party and some state elites in Turkey regarding the UN's Annan Plan,²⁴ one would content that the JDP government brought along a substantial change in the existing foreign policy strategies.

One of the major reasons behind the transformation of Turkey's Cyprus policy discourses and strategies was the JDP government's political ambition to start the accession negotiations with the EU by 2005. This desire became very evident, when the Turkish government extended unprecedented support in 2004 to the negotiation process over the fifth and latest version of the peace plan developed by the then UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan. The subsequent 24 April referenda in Cyprus received an equal amount of support from the JDP.²⁵ The Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, during his official visit to Washington in January 2004, declared that Turkey supported the peace plan developed by the UN Secretary General in its full means.²⁶

Despite the JDP government's support of the 2004 Annan Plan, the resolution of the Cyprus problem was a far more complicated issue that went beyond any consensus among Greece, Turkey and the EU. The resolution had to involve the establishment of peaceful coexistence through democratic means, between Turkish and Greek Cypriots. The international community's attempts to reconcile the two peoples of the island evidently go decades back from the Helsinki European Council summit of 1999. Yet, the peoples of Cyprus have always found it impossibly difficult to agree on any series of plans under the auspice of the UN.²⁷

On the eve of the double referenda to be held in Cyprus, Turkish Cypriots were backed by a considerable number of pro-EU, reformist

state and political elites in Turkey supporting the comprehensive settlement plan proposed by Annan.²⁸ Within this context, the Turkish party claimed mutual recognition, equal sovereignty rights, and establishment of a federal (or con-federal) model of governance and voted 'Yes' in their 24 April referendum. The Greek Cypriot community, however, to the surprise of the world public, rejected the plan in the referendum held on their side of the island, even though the Annan Plan was infamous for favoring the Greek Cypriot administration over the internationally unrecognized Turkish Cypriot state. The failure of the Annan Plan has, in fact, demonstrated that Greek Cypriots were still reluctant to accept that Turkish Cypriots had equal sovereignty rights with them in governing Cyprus, and were uncompromised in their ambition of unifying Cyprus under a Greek government.²⁹ As a result, neither a federal solution nor a system of shared sovereign and constitutional rights could be achieved between Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots. As one observer has noted, the political manipulation boosting up the feelings of insecurity on both sides of the island during the referendum campaigns triggered a spectacularly communal distrust among Greek Cypriots.³⁰ Their concerns over whether Turkey would let the implementation of the plan work smoothly, whether the island would eventually become a Turkish protectorate, or whether there would be a secure future for Cyprus predominated the Annan-Plan discussions. Furthermore, the fact that the EU would not exert any 'conditionality' sanction on Greek Cypriots in case of their rejection of the plan and would grant them the membership no matter what paved the way to the doom of the Annan Plan.

Between the years 2002 and 2003, the support provided by the reformist camp of the political and state elites for a democratic settlement in Cyprus was an integral part of the foreign-policy strategy change that took place within the framework of Turkey's Europeanization process. In search for a viable solution to the Cyprus issue, democratic concerns prevailed over security priorities in the rhetoric of Turkey's foreign policy. However, the Greek Cypriot community's rejection of the UN plan has rendered the prospects for an enduring solution in Cyprus even more complicated. Following the failure of the plan, the Turkish government declared that Turkey had given full support to the UN efforts in settling the dispute through peaceful, democratic means.³¹

Additionally, after the referendum process, the then Chief of the General Staff Hilmi Özkök (2005) said that

the Turkish Armed Forces has always supported a just and lasting solution to the Cyprus issue ... There have been two consequences of the April 24 referendums; no longer can anyone accuse either Turkey or the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus of causing an impasse on the Cyprus issue ... Turkey could recognize a new order emerging from a negotiation process to be held among parties with equal political status on the island, one which would not be a continuation of the 1960 Republic of Cyprus. This new order must not harm the rights of Turkey arising from the Treaties of Guarantee and Alliance.³²

As one may know, the position of the Turkish military on the Cyprus question is of key significance. On this account, the above words by Özkök must have been heard. The traditional position of the Turkish army on the Cyprus question refuses the withdrawal of the Turkish troops from the island unless a peaceful settlement to the satisfaction of all the parties involved has been reached.³³

In the aftermath of the referenda, the Turkish authorities, including the military, expressed their disappointment in the EU's policy strategies on Cyprus. The Turkish government reminded that Turkey provided its full support to the democratic settlement of the issue in line with the short-term priorities set forth in the Accession Partnership Document. Prime Minister Erdoğan at the World Press Meeting held in November 2006 openly criticized any consideration of the resolution of Cyprus issue as a precondition for the smooth functioning of Turkey's accession process.³⁴ According to the government, after the Turkish Cypriots "Yes" in the referendum, the EU now had to strengthen the channels of political dialogue and economic cooperation with the TRNC and to take initiative to end the Turkish Cypriots' incomprehensibly long isolation from the international community.³⁵ Meanwhile, the government of the TRNC voiced similar criticisms. President Talat, elected on 20 April 2005, declared that "[w]e want a federal state composed of two regions and two people. And, we want for there to be political equality between the two sides. For us this is indispensable. The decision in a united

Cypriot state shall reflect equality.”³⁶ It has thus become clearer than ever that without the maintenance of successful negotiations between the two Cypriot governments on the island, peaceful settlement will remain a naïve dream. Unfortunately, the EU’s admission of the Greek Cypriot government, without necessitating the representation of the Turkish Cypriot community has not only pushed this dream further away, but weakened conflict resolution mechanisms of the UN as well.

Conclusion: Is Europeanization of Turkey’s Foreign Policy Strengthens the Prospects of Democratic Settlement in Cyprus?

The recent change in Turkey’s Cyprus policy along the guidelines of the EU’s political conditionality has encouraged the European Council in its decision to open accession negotiation talks with Turkey on 3 October 2005. However, as an undesired outcome on Turkey’s behalf, the resolution of the Cyprus problem has been established as one of the preconditions for the EU membership of Turkey. The stalemate on the island now inevitably hinders the pace of Turkey’s accession negotiations. On 11 December 2006, the European Council, upon the recommendation of the European Commission, decided to partially suspend accession negotiations on eight of the thirty five negotiating areas with Turkey under the pretext that Turkey had failed to implement its obligation under the Association Agreement to remove trade barriers applied Greek Cypriots. The EU’s Commissioner for Enlargement, Olli Rehn, affirmed that the Turkish Parliament “must ratify the Customs Union Additional Protocol in order for the accession negotiations to proceed.”³⁷

The JDP government expressed its objections to the decision of the European Council.³⁸ And, Prime Minister Erdoğan subsequently responded to the same decision as such: “Nobody shall expect us to open the airports and ports unless the isolation of Northern Cyprus is relieved.”³⁹ According to the Turkish government, all of this was very unfair on Turkey. Cyprus cannot be an obstacle to Turkey’s accession negotiations, since the resolution of the problem depends on the negotiation talks between the Turkish and the Greek Cypriots in the first place. The then Foreign Minister Abdullah Gül similarly stated that “Turkey is committed to the objective of becoming a full member of the EU ... the platform for the resolution of the Cyprus problem is not the EU but the UN.”⁴⁰ The Republican People’s Party, too joined the JDP

government in expressing concerns on the European Council's decisions to partially suspend the accession negotiations with Turkey. The deputy leader of the party, Onur Öymen, for instance, asserted that the EU membership of Greek Cypriots, in fact, created a situation in violation of international law and the violation would endure, unless a permanent settlement had been found. In Öymen's words, "this membership has become a tool to hinder Turkey's accession process, it is difficult for Turkey to make any concession before the TRNC is recognized as politically equal or Turkey becomes a member of the EU."⁴¹

In the post-2006 period, still in compliance with the EU conditionality, the Turkish government offered several policy propositions leading to the termination of the TRNC's isolation, if not to its recognition by the international community. The JDP government also encouraged Greek Cypriots to open their ports and airports to Turkish Cypriots, as a step that could eventually result in a change in Turkey's current implementation of the Customs Union Agreement. Therefore, Turkey's foreign policy rhetoric on Cyprus suggests that a lasting solution is dependent on an agreement that would take into consideration the demands of Turkish Cypriots.⁴² This stance has now come to define Ankara's conditions for reconsidering "lifting the barriers to trade with Greek Cyprus so as to implement the *acquis* and make it possible to recognize Southern Cyprus within the framework of the Customs Union Agreement and other negotiation frameworks within the EU."⁴³ In 2006, Gül contended that no option other than the recognition of the political equality of the two Cypriot communities was acceptable.⁴⁴

All in all, the Turkish government expects the EU to pursue economic and foreign policies that would relieve the isolation of the Turkish Cypriots and would support a plan for the international recognition of the TRNC. Once such conditions have been met, substantial change in Turkish foreign policy required by the EU would follow. Within this context, Turkey's efforts towards finding a peaceful and democratic settlement of the issue have continued in the wake of the Brussels Presidency Conclusions of 2006. In January 2006, Turkey put forward an action plan that aimed to enforce political cooperation between Greece and Turkey. The Action Plan, which was in part designed to create a breakthrough in the Cyprus impasse, was considered by some as a significant initiative in the sense that it proposed to open Turkey's

one seaport and one airport to Greek Cypriots. In order to promote this new action plan, Gül spelled out the following words to CNN:

I believe we can build confidence between the two sides with this action plan...We propose to lift all kind of economic restrictions on the island. With this action plan we offer to open our seaports, our airports, but also Greek Cypriot side should remove economic embargoes imposed on the Turkish side.⁴⁵

Although the plan was welcomed by the European Commission as a novel step in the solution of the frozen Cyprus conflict, some UN and EU officials pointed out the vagueness of the statements in the Action Plan and recommended its substantial revision. Nevertheless, in the UN Security Council's session of June 2006, the plan played a certain role in conveying the world public the message that "Greek Cypriots seem to remain resistant to any initiatives on substantive issues by the UN or other third parties." Hardly surprising, Greek Cypriots rejected the Action Plan on the grounds that "the concessions offered were already obligations Turkey had undertaken towards the European Union."⁴⁶

To conclude, as this analysis of the Turkish political elite's discourse and EU's official papers demonstrates, a considerable shift in Turkey's foreign policy towards Cyprus has taken place from 1999 to present. In this shift, a civic understanding has infused into the underlining security concerns of Turkey, as it has adopted a rhetoric emphasizing the notion of a democratic settlement. Turkey's ongoing Europeanization process has been one of the factors influencing the foreign policy strategies, tools and opportunity structures in the hands of policy-makers. However, the fact that the EU granted the full membership status to the Greek Cypriot administration before the conflict had been resolved has spectacularly hindered the prospect for further Europeanization of the Turkish foreign policy Europeanization. What is important here, the EU's normative power to promote a lasting solution to the Cyprus issue has been, in fact, weakened by its own enlargement policy strategy. Even though the solution on the island requires the success of the bilateral negotiations between the Turkish and Greek Cypriot communities in the first place, substantial progress in the Turkey-EU confidence-building attempts could stimulate the progress in the ongoing negotiations on the island. Substantial progress, of course, stands for a breakthrough, no less a

development than the lift of the political barriers *de facto* blocking the membership negotiations of Turkey.

The reinvigoration of Turkey's Europeanization process through the alignment of foreign and security policies with the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy could, in effect, sufficiently facilitate the democratic settlement in Cyprus. As it comes to the fore here, finding a stable solution to the Cyprus issue involves the peaceful coexistence of Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots, which depends on the restoration of confidence between the two communities. Currently, bilateral peace talks continue between the Cypriot leaders, even though an agreement to satisfy both sides has not yet been reached. Still, the change in the EU's current discouraging attitude towards Turkey's accession process could at once boost up the impact of Europeanization on the Turkish foreign policy and hence contribute to the breaking of the deadlock on the Cyprus question.

Endnotes

¹ "Babacan: Kıbrıs'ta yeni bir ortaklığa hazırız" (Babacan: We are ready for a new partnership in Cyprus), *Güncelnet*, May 9, 2005. Retrieved from <http://www.guncelnet/ea/17449> on November 20, 2008.

² Meltem Müftüler-Baç and Aylin Güney, "The European Union and the Cyprus Problem," *Middle Eastern Studies* 41(2005): 281.

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⁴ Commission of the European Communities, *Turkey's 2008 Progress Report* (Brussels, 5 November 2008).

⁵ Meltem Müftüler-Baç, 'The Cyprus Debacle: What the Future Holds,' *Futures* 28(1999), 560.

⁶ For in-depth analysis of the history of the Cyprus problem, see Clement Dodd, *Update on the Cyprus Conflict*. (Cambridgeshire: Eothen Press, 2006), and *Storm Clouds Over Cyprus: A Briefing*. (Huntingdon: Eothen Press, 2002). Chronology of events is also available from <http://www.euractiv.com/eng/enlargement/turkey-accession-cyprus/article-135940>.

⁷ UN plans for Cyprus are available from <http://www.un.org>

⁸ Council of the European Union. *Helsinki European Council 10/11 December 1999, Presidency Conclusions*.

⁹ European Commission. *Regular Report 1999 on Turkey's Progress Towards Accession*. (Brussels: Commission of the European Communities, 1999).

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