

## **CYPRUS: A NOTE ON SECURITY GUARANTEES AND THREAT PERCEPTIONS**

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### **Introduction**

On 17 December, Turkey crossed an important threshold in the country's 40-year long road towards EU membership when the EU decided to open accession negotiations with Turkey on 3 October 2005. In the weeks leading up to the critical summit in Brussels and despite the EU Commission's October progress report recommending the start of accession talks, there were lengthy discussions over the extent to which Turkey qualified as a member of the organisation. European policymakers repeatedly debated the country's European identity, its demographic growth, its relative poverty and commitment to democratisation. However, at the summit itself, it was the question of Cyprus that very nearly brought negotiations to a standstill.

The Justice and Development Party (AKP) government representing Turkey at the summit was particularly infuriated at the

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<sup>1</sup>The views expressed reflect those of the author and not the Peace Research Institute, Oslo (PRIO). Thanks to the PRIO Cyprus Centre staff for their comments to this short paper.

pressure brought to bear on Turkey over Cyprus. Through their efforts since 2002, they felt they had fulfilled their commitments vis-à-vis the EU on the issue of Cyprus in accordance with the EU's Accession Partnership Document. While Turkey and the Turkish Cypriots have traditionally been regarded as the primary obstructions to a settlement of the Cyprus problem, the AKP in a volte-face of Turkey's long-established Cyprus policy in early 2004 gave their support to UN efforts for a resolution. This unprecedented move was spurred by the May 2004 accession of the Republic of Cyprus to the EU. Turkish Cypriots did not want to be left out, Turkey did not want to endanger its own application for membership, and the EU was reticent to welcome a divided Cyprus as a new member. Under the circumstances, the UN saw a window of opportunity through which it could encourage the hitherto recalcitrant Turkish Cypriots. However, the Greek Cypriot leadership, already ensured EU membership, believed they could renegotiate a better plan for their side from a stronger position after 1 May. In short, the referendum on the fifth version of the Annan plan held on 24 April 2004 resulted in an overwhelming rejection (75.8%) by the Greek Cypriot community. The adamantly negative response was even greater than most analysts predicted. For their part, the Turkish Cypriots voted in favour of the Annan plan by 64.91%.

Turkey and the Turkish Cypriots expected that in return for their approval of the plan, the EU would release 259 million euros of aid and lift the trade ban. However, in the following months, the Republic of Cyprus, now an EU member, successfully prevented the release of funds, arguing that this would amount to *de facto* recognition. The conflict once again took centre stage during the EU's Brussels' Summit in December. The EU pointed out the difficulty of opening accession negotiations with Turkey when the country did not recognize the legitimacy of one of the member states' governments.<sup>2</sup> The problem lay in expanding the Ankara Agreement to the ten new members of the EU, including the Republic of Cyprus. This time it was Turkey that balked at signing a trade agreement which could constitute *de facto* recognition of the Republic of Cyprus government. In the end, Turkey agreed to expand the Ankara

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<sup>2</sup>The Republic of Cyprus had in fact, lobbied for this point for several months and threatened to veto the opening of accession negotiations with Turkey.

Agreement by the date of accession while including the proviso that a trade agreement did not imply recognition.

Thus, the EU summit ended with a face saving option for both sides. It also regenerated hopes that a solution would be found before the start of accession negotiations with Turkey. There is a clear incentive for the Turkish Cypriots and Turkey to renegotiate an agreement with the Greek Cypriots. A resolution before 3 October would eliminate the dilemma of *de facto* recognition and remove any obstacles to Turkish EU membership. For the Turkish Cypriots, it is a long-awaited opportunity to end their isolation and resolve the over 40-year conflict.

If Turkey and the Turkish Cypriots are committed to a settlement before the fall, it will be necessary for them to reconsider the most important obstacle to Greek Cypriot support: the security issue.

### **Greek Cypriot security concerns**

Before addressing particular issues at hand, a few words of reflection on the concept of security; Firstly, the idea of security has a political dimension inherent in the definition of threat. The latter is in turn the key to the study of security without which security, a derivative concept, is meaningless.<sup>3</sup> Secondly, given that security (and threat) stems from individual or collective perceptions, and the manner in which two actors interpret a given reality may vary, perceptions of threat will likewise also vary. Thirdly, perceptions that are clear to one side might be inscrutable to the other. As a result one actor may not fully appreciate how another can perceive a real threat in a symbolic demand. Therefore, security is very often in the eyes of the beholder and needs to be evaluated accordingly. A further complication is the 'securitization' of issues by political actors to meet their own needs.<sup>4</sup> Through their discourse, issues open to

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<sup>3</sup>Keith Krause and Michael C. Williams (eds.), *Critical Security Studies: Concepts and Cases*, London: UCL Press, p. ix

<sup>4</sup>For more on the concept of 'securitization', see Ole Wæver, 'Securitization and Desecuritization' in Ronnie D. Lipchultz (ed.) *On Security*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1995.

resolution within the arena of politics become existential threats that can only be addressed as security issues and thereby politically non-negotiable.

While the underlying sense of insecurity overwhelmingly defines the attitudes of both sides to the issues arising in the negotiations, it is the Greek Cypriot community who cite this as the primary reason for rejecting the Annan Plan. Nevertheless, the strong sense of insecurity prevalent in Greek Cypriot discussions of the Annan Plan is often dismissed by the other side.

In a poll taken on 10-12 May, 51% of Greek Cypriots indicated that they would vote 'yes', (with 34% saying 'no' and 15% undecided) if assurances were given on the issue of implementation (Turkey's cooperation) and security. This echoed the concerns of the government's largest coalition partner, AKEL, who in an unexpected move, voted against the plan. AKEL noted that they were concerned with guarantees both **on** the Plan and **outside** the Plan for its implementation.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, following the negative referendum result, Greek Cypriot President Papadopoulos launched an international information campaign based on an 11-point memorandum outlining the aspects of Annan V that constitute an obstacle to a solution. Of these, the first three revolve around questions of Turkish troops, the right of intervention under the 1960 Treaty of Guarantee and the doubts over implementation.<sup>6</sup>

Both the question of Turkish troops and the maintenance of the Treaty of Guarantee were the *sine qua non* security demands of the Turkish Cypriot side. However, I argue that the security assurances they provide for Turkey and the Turkish Cypriots are proportionally

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<sup>5</sup>Yiouli Taki and Ayla Gurel, "Political Situation on Cyprus as of June 2004", *PRIO Internal Report*.

<sup>6</sup>Due to the constraints of space, I choose to focus on these three aspects although the remaining issues can also be interpreted from a Greek Cypriot security perspective. These include the number of Turkish settlers allowed to remain, participation of settlers in the referendum, the permanent residence of Turkish citizens on the island, the violation or suspension of fundamental freedoms and rights, the right of return of refugees, the economic costs of the solution, potential problems in the functionality of the state and finally, the non-participation of Cyprus in the ESDP.

less than the perceived threat they represent for the Greek Cypriot community. Given that these issues will resurface in the next round of bargaining, they deserve closer scrutiny.

The more contentious of the two issues is the question of Turkish troops. According to the fifth version of the Annan Plan, both sides would reduce their troop levels to 6000. However, following the insistence of the Turkish Cypriot side, 650 troops (all ranks) may remain in Cyprus even after Turkey's EU accession.<sup>7</sup> This demand was a departure from an earlier version of the Annan Plan (Annan III) that foresaw the departure of all troops following Turkey's accession to the EU.<sup>8</sup> The second point on which the Turkish Cypriot side and Turkey insisted was the continuation of Turkish guarantees and the right to unilateral intervention as prescribed in the 1960 Treaty of Guarantee. Both demands were forwarded to ensure the security of Turkish Cypriots. But can these security assurances actually provide more, or less, security for Turkish Cypriots?

The paradox is illustrated in Robert Jervis' 'security dilemma'.<sup>9</sup> A state's efforts to provide security through increasing, or, in this case, maintaining arms may have the opposite effect of augmenting the threat perceptions of the other side thus actually decreasing the given state's security. Thus, demands for maintaining Turkish troops on the island, symbolic though their numbers may be,<sup>10</sup> and the insistence on maintaining the Treaty of Guarantee may substantiate fears of a future intervention, reinforced by the memories

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<sup>7</sup>Although the Secretary General's Report does state that the 'arrangement would be subject to regular reviews with a view to eventual total withdrawal by mutual consent', *Report of the UN Secretary-General on his mission of good offices in Cyprus*, 28 May 2004 (S/2004/437), Article 55.

<sup>8</sup>Hubert Faustmann, 'Security Concerns and the Failure of the Annan Plan', unpublished paper, October 2004, p.18

<sup>9</sup>Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1976, pp. 63-76

<sup>10</sup>The idea that the Turkish military presence is symbolic will undoubtedly be contested by those who regard Cyprus as a national security issue. I argue from the perspective that conflict requiring intervention is both unlikely and politically too costly to be considered. Not to mention, Cyprus proximity – some 60 kilometres – to Turkey and the size of the Turkish military should be considered a sufficient security guarantee.

of Turkey's 1974 action. Accordingly, in line with Jervis' thinking, the Turkish Cypriot side's insistence on these two guarantees may be self-defeating, particularly if they are interpreted by Greek Cypriots as indicative of hostile intent. More insidiously, Turkish/Turkish Cypriot demands provide the necessary ammunition for Greek Cypriot political actors seeking to 'securitize' the issue, raising the perception of threat and ensuring Greek Cypriot rejection of any proposed settlement.

The third Greek Cypriot concern, implementation, hinges on the success of the international community in providing assurances. As in most aspects of the Cyprus problem, the spectre of the past weighs heavily on the present on this issue too. The insecurity of both sides, the island's 30-year division, and the insularity with which the Cyprus problem is discussed makes this issue equally open to securitization.<sup>11</sup> Political actors against the Annan Plan on both sides have argued that the 1960 Treaty of Guarantee establishing Cypriot sovereignty was imposed by outside powers, broke down in a three-year period, and left both sides bitter with the international community's response. As a result, there is little faith in the international community's willingness to involve itself should a reunification effort end in failure. Thus, Greek Cypriot President Papadopoulos, lobbying against Annan V, stated that he was not willing to take a risk that might lead to a loss of recognition for the Greek Cypriots – demoting their status to that of a community from that of a state - should the plan fail.<sup>12</sup>

However, the UN and EU who have a vested interest in the success of the plan will closely monitor its implementation. According to Annan V, the UN's peacekeeping operations will be committed, not only to providing a secure environment, but also promoting compliance with the Agreement. In addition, a monitoring committee chaired by the UN and made up of representatives of the guarantor powers, the federal government, and the constituent states

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<sup>11</sup>By insularity, I refer to the lack of appreciation by both sides of the changing international environment and the consequences this has for the Cyprus problem.

<sup>12</sup>This comment was brought to my attention by Yiouli Taki.

will ensure the implementation of a Foundation Agreement.<sup>13</sup> In a further effort at addressing Greek Cypriot security concerns, the UN forwarded a draft resolution aimed at strengthening the UN force and imposing an arms embargo to support the demilitarization of the island. However, the resolution was ironically defeated by Russia in line with AKEL and Papadopoulos' wishes.<sup>14</sup>

For its part, the EU is acutely aware of the problems that a divided Cyprus presents the organization. On the policy level, the lack of a settlement constrains any efforts the EU makes towards normalizing trade relations with the North. As noted earlier, this has stood in the way of releasing 259 million euros in aid promised to the Turkish Cypriots following the referendum. The lack of a resolution also has a wider effect on other key EU projects such as the Common European Security and Defence Policy where Turkey, by denying Cyprus security clearance, prevents cooperation between NATO and the EU on intelligence and security issues.<sup>15</sup> Finally, the failure of the Annan Plan has led to a loss of credibility for both organizations; the UN, which initiated the fifth round of negotiations based specifically on an understanding that there was willingness from both sides to find a settlement, and the EU, whose enlargement philosophy, founded on the idea of spreading peace and prosperity, has, to date, failed in the case of Cyprus.

### **The road ahead**

In the nine months leading to the start of Turkey's accession negotiations, the pressure will be on to find a solution. Although the incentives are greater for Turkey and the Turkish Cypriots, the Greek Cypriots are aware that the pressure is on them to make a serious effort towards settlement. Greek Cypriot President Papadopoulos,

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<sup>13</sup> Alexis Alexiou, Ayla Gurel, Mete Hatay and Yiouli Taki, *The Annan Plan for Cyprus: A Citizen's Guide*, International Peace Research Institute, Oslo, 2003, p.46.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, Faustmann, p. 23. This begs the question: How real is the threat of non implementation and to what extent is it an issue that was conveniently mobilized to ensure a 'no' vote?

<sup>15</sup> Judy Dempsey, 'For EU and NATO, snags over intelligence', *International Herald Tribune*, 15 November 2004.

accused of negotiating in 'bad faith' during the last round, needs to improve Cyprus' relations with the EU. The Greek Cypriots are also aware that there is not likely to be a better opportunity for them to pursue their own demands given Turkey's preference for a settlement before expanding the Ankara Agreement to include Cyprus. This being said, Turkey, with the backing of the UK, has stated that a trade agreement does not constitute recognition.

For their part, Turkey and the Turkish Cypriots need to re-evaluate the security guarantees they demand, determining their real value against the cost they incur lending support to existing threat perceptions in the Greek Cypriot community.

Finally, the EU and the UN need to play a constructive role by increasing awareness of security assurances inherent in EU membership as well as in international law and the principles of the UN Charter. Without a clear framework of external security guarantees, no amount of incentives will yield a lasting solution.

As it stands today, the Green Line is not simply a barrier between the two communities but a mirror<sup>16</sup> reflecting, on both sides, a sense of insecurity that needs to be overcome through the assurances of the international community and the continued efforts of civil society if a settlement to the Cyprus problem is to be successful.

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<sup>16</sup>I would like to thank lawyer Emine Erk who, in an interview (15.10.04), inspired me with this imagery.