

The EU Conditionality in the Cyprus Problem: Catalyzing Euro-Scepticism in Turkey?

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Abstract

The objectives of this article are twofold. In the first part, it aims to discuss the EU policies towards the Cyprus problem with regard to the concept of conditionality. As regards the analytical distinction between negative and positive conditionality, the authors argue that there are variations in the EU strategy towards the Cyprus question that could be analyzed in three main phases. In the second part, the article evaluates the responses of the Turkish political elite to the variations in the EU strategy on Cyprus. In this respect, the main question of this article is whether there is a link between Euro-skepticism in Turkey and the EU's conditionality strategy concerning the Cyprus problem.

Key words: conditionality, euro-skepticism, Cyprus, Turkey, European Union, Turkish political elite, Greek Cypriot administration, TRNC

Özet

Bu makalenin amacı iki aşamalıdır. Birinci aşamada, AB'nin Kıbrıs politikalarını şartlılık bağlamında tartışmayı amaçlamaktadır. Yazarlar, negatif ve pozitif şartlılık arasındaki analitik farklılık göz önüne alındığında, AB'nin Kıbrıs sorununa yönelik stratejisindeki değişmelerin üç dönemde incelenebileceğini öne sürmektedir. İkinci aşama olarak bu makale, AB'nin Kıbrıs stratejisindeki değişmelere Türk siyasi elitinin tepkisini değerlendirmektedir. Bu açıdan, bu makalenin esas amacı, Türkiye'deki Avrupa şüpheciliği ile AB'nin Kıbrıs sorunu bağlamında uyguladığı şartlılık stratejisi arasında bir bağ olup olmadığını anlamaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Şartlılık, Avrupa Şüpheciliği, Kıbrıs, Türkiye, AB, Türk Siyasi Eliti, Kıbrıs Rum Yönetimi, KKTC

Introduction

With the membership application of the Greek Cypriot Administration (GCA) to the EU, the Union has become a key actor in the Cyprus question. The involvement of the EU in the problem has created obstacles for both Turkey's EU membership process and the resolution of the ongoing problems. Accordingly, the objectives of this article are twofold.

In the first part, it aims to discuss the EU policies towards the Cyprus problem with specific reference to the concept of *conditionality*. As regards to the analytical distinction between negative and positive conditionality, the authors here argue that there are variations in the EU strategy towards the Cyprus question that could be analyzed in three main phases. Within this context, this article will first provide a brief discussion of the concept of conditionality and then discuss the three phases that reveal the shifting EU policy on Cyprus, with a particular focus on the core documents of the EU such as the European Council decisions and the Commission progress reports. In the second part, the article will evaluate the responses of the Turkish political elite to the variations in the EU strategy on Cyprus. The main question that this article is concerned with is whether there is a link between *Euro-skepticism* in Turkey and the EU's conditionality strategy towards the Cyprus problem. Therefore, after a brief discussion on the concept of Euro-skepticism, the relevant discourses of Turkish governments and opposition parties since the early 1990s will be examined along with the results of a recent short survey done among the deputies of a Turkish opposition party (CHP). Finally, the existence of a viable link between the EU Cyprus policy and Euro-skepticism in Turkey will be sought.

Prelude: From 1990 to 1993

The motivation for the Greek Cypriot administration in applying for the European Community (EC) membership was mainly about political rather than economic gains.¹ The political gains that it expected to attain were to be used against Turkey. The GCA assumed that its accession on behalf of the whole island would make it possible to put pressures on Turkey and the Turkish Cypriot community through the European Union (EU) conditionality that worked in favour of GCA interests.²

The GCA's application to the EU was based on the Association Agreement signed on 14 May 1973 between the EC and Cyprus President Makarios. In order to ensure stability in the eastern Mediterranean region and have access to Middle Eastern markets via Cyprus, the EC developed economic relations with Cyprus through this agreement. However, it was reluctant to politicize this relationship in order to preserve its "neutral" image in the eyes of the conflicting parties, including Turkey.³ Consequently, the EC decisions concerning its relations with Cyprus insisted on the non-discrimination principle towards the other concerned

parties as well as Turkish Cypriots.⁴ Finally, as Christou remarks, the EC was equally reluctant to respond to Turkey's intervention in Cyprus in 1974. Following the Turkish intervention, it suspended commercial relations with Cyprus until 1986, when Greece – an EC member since 1981 - convinced the EC to restart economic integration with Cyprus. Three years later, the EC decided to provide financial assistance to Cyprus and deepen the economic relations by signing the third financial protocol. According to Christou, the EC attempted to limit the developing relations with the economic domain and pursue non-discrimination by highlighting that the development of economic relations with Cyprus would be beneficial to both Cypriot communities.⁵

The GCA membership application, nonetheless, risked adding a political dimension to the EC-Cyprus relations. In June 1990, the European Council of Dublin concluded that:

The European Council, deeply concerned at the situation, fully reaffirms its previous declarations and its support for the unity, independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Cyprus in accordance with the relevant UN resolutions. Reiterating that the Cyprus problem affects EC-Turkey relations and bearing in mind the importance of these relations, it stresses the need for the prompt elimination of the obstacles that are preventing the pursuit of effective intercommunal talks aimed at finding a just and viable solution to the question of Cyprus on the basis of the mission of good offices of the Secretary General, as it was recently reaffirmed by resolution 649/90 of the Security Council.⁶

The Dublin Council statements openly demonstrate the three tenets of the EU stance towards the Cyprus question at that time. Firstly, the necessity to solve the political problem in Cyprus under the United Nations (UN) aegis was underlined. Secondly, the damaging effect of the Cyprus problem on Turkey-EC relations was recognized and thirdly, the importance of these relations was stressed -at the expense of the GCA efforts towards further integration with the EC.

Briefly, two main factors reinforced the EC's reluctance to respond to the GCA's membership application in 1990. Firstly, the preparation of the Maastricht Treaty that would transform the EC to the EU provided

limited time and capacity for the member states to get involved in a remarkably difficult political problem such as Cyprus. Secondly, two European member states were already actively involved in the Cyprus conflict, namely the UK and Greece. Such involvement could have restricted an impartial and coherent European policy towards the Cyprus question. In particular, Greece had developed the habit of using the EC/EU as a forum to raise its problems with Turkey in the Aegean Sea and Cyprus since its accession to the EC (Christou, 54). It even blocked the subsequent financial assistance under the customs union regulations concerning Turkey although, prior to its membership, Athens had affirmed that its accession to the EC would not undermine the EC's balanced approach towards Turkey.⁷

The GCA's application for EU membership was perceived as a threatening condition by Turkey and the Turkish Cypriot Community. The concerns were about the possibilities that, in case of GCA membership in the name of the Republic of Cyprus, Turkey's accession to the EU could have been hampered by the GCA's veto and the status of the Turkish Cypriot community would have been relegated to that of a minority in the Republic of Cyprus. It should here be remembered that Turkey and the Turkish Cypriot leadership rejected any solution basis other than the UN. Consequently, Turkey had to criticize the appointment of a EU envoy to Cyprus during the intercommunal talks.⁸ And the Turkish Cypriot leader, Denktaş, sent a letter to the European Commission in order to protest the unilateral application of the GCA for EU membership. The letter re-emphasized the established legalities and stressed that Cyprus's membership in an international organization where not all of the three guarantor states were members would have violated the Cypriot Constitution of 1960.

Contrary to the Turkish arguments, the Greek Minister of Foreign Affairs overtly conducted lobbying activities in the European Commission in favour of the GCA candidacy, advancing the novel argument that the EU should not avoid its responsibility to "catalyze" the resolution of the Cyprus problem.⁹ For its part, the GCA asked for a positive opinion from the Commission on the issue of its application though it did not press for an explicit accession calendar.¹⁰ Then it increased the intensity of its diplomatic campaigns based on three arguments. First, it claimed to be the official representative of the Republic of Cyprus. Second, it argued that it was not fair to give a non-

recognized entity, the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), and a non-member of the Union, Turkey, the opportunity to hold the EU hostage by blocking the GCA's admission to the Union. Finally, the GCA underlined that it had mobilized all its resources to fulfil the EU membership criteria.¹¹

The pressures and lobbies of Greece and the GCA were successful to convince the European Commission to issue a positive opinion on Cyprus candidature in June 1993.¹² The Commission stated that “[Cyprus’s accession to the Community] would help bring the two communities on the island closer together” and “implies a peaceful, balanced and lasting settlement of the Cyprus question”. Finally, rejecting the rightful Turkish protests, it claimed that Cyprus’s membership of the Union would be of benefit to all interested parties.¹³ Unsurprisingly, Turkey and the TRNC immediately protested the Commission decision. The Turkish Foreign Minister sent a letter to the Belgian President of the EU Council to convey that the Commission’s opinion regarding the GCA undermined international law as well as the UN efforts.¹⁴ The Turkish Cypriot leadership protested the EU’s *de facto* recognition of the GCA as the official government of the Republic of Cyprus and decided to increase its efforts for the official recognition of the TRNC’s independence.¹⁵

These developments reinforced the impasse in the UN negotiations even more strongly. The appointment of Serge Abou as the EU envoy to Cyprus demonstrated the EU’s will to develop a coherent strategy towards the interested parties in Cyprus in order to “catalyze” the reunification.¹⁶ However, extremely concerned over the loss of equal footing with the GCA, the Turkish Cypriot community, together with Turkey, reacted negatively to the EU’s developing “presence” in Cyprus.

The Conceptualization of the EU Strategy

In the following section, the strategy of the EU towards the parties in the Cyprus conflict aspiring to EU membership will be explained briefly in three phases. Given the developing branch of the current literature on the transforming effect of the EU conditionality on member and candidate states,¹⁷ this article suggests that in spite of its incapacity to act as a unified and coherent body, the EU could nevertheless use conditionality as a strategy to pressurize EU candidates to converge with EU preferences in general, and on the Cyprus question in particular.

The EU preferences on the Cyprus question exceed the aggregation of the domestic preferences of its member states actively involved in the Cyprus conflict, the United Kingdom and Greece as guarantor powers in the first place. This is mainly due to the institutionalized membership criteria and related policies that are not easily reversible by the individual member states. In this sense, the article will focus on the relevant European Council decisions as well as the Commission reports rather than the national divergences among the EU member states. Additionally, it will be grounded on the assumption that the EU strategy towards Turkey and the GCA is based on the conditionality principle. In other words, it will venture to highlight that had the GCA and Turkey withdrawn their application for membership, there would be no sufficient ground for a EU strategy at all.

According to Checkel, “[c]onditionality is a basic strategy through which international institutions promote compliance by national governments”. For the purposes of this article, an analytical distinction between negative and positive conditionality appears to be useful. Negative conditionality of the EU is based on the threat of exclusion and sanctions towards the applicant states as well as the withdrawal of rewards. Through negative conditionality, the EU hopes to modify the behaviour of the applicant state by increasing the costs of non-compliance with the EU. Positive conditionality implies the EU’s offers of material and social incentives to the applicant countries, such as financial assistance or more concrete prospects for membership that allow participation in the EU forums -albeit in a limited way.¹⁸

Against this background, it could be argued that there are variations in the EU strategy towards the Cyprus question in the era spanning from the GCA’s application for membership to the present day. In the first phase from 1993 to 1999, the EU applied positive conditionality towards the GCA while Turkey was subjected to negative conditionality. In the second phase from 1999 to 2002, the EU changed its strategy towards Turkey in favour of a positive conditionality. In the last phase, it has included Northern Cyprus in its strategy calculus and, following the GCA’s accession to the Union towards the end of the third phase, the EU has returned to its negative conditionality strategy towards Turkey.

It is important to note here that the EU is only one of the international actors involved in the Cyprus question. The role played by the UN and the United States is decisive in the course of Cyprus-related

events. The legitimacy of the UN, of course, is the strongest in comparison to the other external actors in Cyprus. In this sense, the EU strategy does not intend to substitute or duplicate the UN engagement in Cyprus. The EU makes it clear that it intends to complement and facilitate the UN-led negotiations for reunification.

First Phase: From 1993 to 1999

The first phase between 1993 and 1999 is characterised by the EU's double conditionality strategy towards Turkey and the GCA, both at that time having aspired to join the Union. However, in substance, the EU differentiated between the two by applying positive conditionality to the GCA, offering concrete prospects for membership, and by implementing negative conditionality to Turkey. The EU's dealings with Turkey in the first phase, therefore, were conducted through a strategy based on the threat of exclusion and lack of concrete prospects for accession. The main three assumptions underlying the EU's differentiation between Turkey and the GCA are as such: 1) A change in the allegedly intransigent Turkish attitude would bring parties closer to a solution in Cyprus. 2) the GCA's membership prospect would lead Turkey to a more compromising position in the Cyprus problem. 3) This change of attitude in Turkey would be directly influential on the TRNC's stance.¹⁹

Meanwhile, during the first phase, the resolution of the Cyprus problem became a pre-condition for Turkey's EU membership, whereas the GCA was granted official candidacy without such a political pre-condition. Finally, the TRNC was excluded from the EU strategy, as it was not an officially recognized entity. In the coming section, first the EU's double conditionality strategy towards Turkey and the GCA and the exclusion of the TRNC will be studied. Then, the political outcomes concerning the Cyprus imbroglio as well as the evaluation of the EU strategy in terms of its efficiency to resolve the impasse will be assessed.

EU Double Conditionality Strategy: Including the GCA While Excluding Turkey

The EU's positive conditionality towards the GCA started on 4 October 1993 with the decision of the EU Council to adopt the European Commission's positive opinion regarding the candidature of the GCA as the Republic of Cyprus. This decision was also supported by the European Council of Corfu in June 1994, which included Cyprus in the

upcoming enlargement without explicit emphasis on the prevailing political conflict on the island.²⁰ In this sense, the decisions of the EU Council were path-breaking as they paved a new way for the GCA accession before the resolution of Cyprus problem (Nugent). The inclusion of Cyprus in the following enlargement was also confirmed by the following European Essen Council, which denied such membership prospects to Turkey.²¹

Turkey's decision to accede to the EU Customs Union in March 1995 prior to its membership coincided with the EU's decision to start accession negotiations with the GCA. On the same day that Turkey signed the EU Customs Union agreement, the EU General Affairs Council announced that the EU would launch accession negotiations with the GCA. According to Hale, the EU's decision was mainly due to the Greek government's pressure in return for not using its veto against Turkey's accession to the EU Customs Union. Greece thus convinced the EU to launch negotiations with the GCA even without a viable political solution. Accordingly, the Agenda 2000 document of the EU suggested the initiation of negotiations with Cyprus (GCA) in the 6 months following the Intergovernmental Conference, while denying similar prospects to Turkey.²² In December 1997, the European Council of Luxembourg officially included Cyprus in the fifth enlargement, while it advised Turkey to improve the political dialogue with the Union by fulfilling particular criteria, including active support of the UN efforts regarding the Cyprus problem.²³ The EU thus expected Turkey to convince the TRNC to participate in the EU-Cyprus accession negotiations as a part of the Cypriot delegation. In that sense, Turkey was not to oppose the accession of Cyprus to the EU either.²⁴ Hence, the Cyprus question became a *sine qua non* for Turkey's bid for EU membership.²⁵ In response, Turkey slowed down the political dialogue with the EU, and the TRNC refused to join the GCA delegation to the EU membership negotiations, which started on 30 March 1998.

Both the issue of the "Communication on a European Strategy for Turkey" document of 4 March 1998 and the inclusion of Turkey in the screening mechanism (legislative examination) by the European Council of Cardiff of 15 June 1998 could be deemed as examples of the EU's continued negative conditionality towards Turkey. They set the relevant EU requirements and threatened to exclude Turkey unless it aligned with those requirements. The first report of the European Commission on

Turkey's progress towards accession confirmed the link between Turkey's membership and its efforts in the Cyprus question.²⁶

The Exclusion of the TRNC

Another significant aspect of the first phase is the EU's reluctance to establish direct contact with the TRNC within the GCA's membership process. Several instances could be highlighted to underpin this point. Firstly, the unilateral application of the GCA on behalf of the two communities on the island was accepted by the EU, despite the fact that the TRNC protested for not having been consulted prior to the application.²⁷ Secondly, certain court decisions should be taken into account. On 5 July 1994, the European Court of Justice (ECJ) decided to ban the export of TRNC goods under the pretext that they did not bear the certificates given by the GCA authorities.²⁸ This decision was clearly to damage the TRNC economy.²⁹ Talmon argues that it was a political decision rather than a legal one. Accordingly, justifying its decision by the non-recognized status of the TRNC, the ECJ "misjudged the scope and consequences of the principle of non-recognition in international law and, in fact, applied economic sanctions, a measure that should be reserved for the political bodies."³⁰ Moreover, the judgements of the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) concerning the *Loizidou* and *Cyprus v. Turkey* cases³¹ revealed that Turkey, and not the TRNC, was recognised as the legitimate authority to be brought to trial for the matters concerning Northern Cyprus. In this respect, it was Turkey, which was forced to pay fines for the alleged violations of the European Human Rights convention.

The EU's invitation to the TRNC to participate in the GCA delegation overlooks two facts. Firstly, such participation would have nullified the TRNC by the *de facto* recognition of the GCA as the sole official representative of the Republic of Cyprus. Secondly, the TRNC's participation in the GCA delegation would have been devoid of sense, since the Turkish Cypriot community was not officially represented in the institutions of the Republic of Cyprus.³² In the light of the instances outlined above, it is argued that the EU refused to pursue direct contact with the Turkish Cypriot leadership during the first stage of the accession process of Cyprus.

Political Developments and the Evaluation of the EU Strategy in the First Phase

In spite of some positive developments in Turkey-EU relations, such as the conclusion of the Customs Union, Turkey's increasing support of the UN efforts in Cyprus, and Turkey-Greece rapprochement, the impasse prevailed throughout the first stage. The TRNC did not participate in the accession negotiations of Cyprus and blocked several times the ongoing UN talks in order to protest the EU's decision to include the GCA in the fifth enlargement on behalf of Cyprus. In the meantime, Turkey and the TRNC launched a closer integration in spite of the EU protests. At the end of this phase, Turkey decided to halt political dialogue with the EU, which meant an effort to curtail the jurisdiction of the EU conditionality over Turkey. Finally and more severely, several international crises such as Kardak (Imia) crisis between Turkey and Greece, the eruption of violent events on the Green Line in Cyprus, and S-300 missile crisis between Turkey and the GCA occurred. In particular, the Kardak and Missile crises could have ended in a war situation, since the Turkish government had declared "casus belli" in both cases, if it were not for US mediation.

The continuation of the impasse in the UN-led talks on Cyprus and the emergence of serious political crises among the involved parties highlighted the necessity for the EU to reconsider its double conditionality strategy. According to Dodd (19), the EU strategy of including Cyprus and excluding Turkey was a big failure, as it ruled out the possibility of convincing Turkey to unblock the prevailing impasse in the Cyprus question. From a similar perspective, in his report, dated 8 February 1996, to the Political Affairs Committee of the Council of Europe, Lord Fingsberg, rapporteur on Cyprus for the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly, criticized both the EU's approval of the GCA candidature and the ECJ decision to ban TRNC exports uncertified by the GCA as factors which widened the confidence gap between the conflicting parties. Furthermore, in November 1998, during the meeting of the EU General Affairs Council, four major EU member states, France, Germany, Italy and the Netherlands submitted a joint statement claiming that the accession of Cyprus to the EU before the resolution of the political problem would have implied serious risks for the EU's security as it would have imported a territorial conflict to the

EU.³³ Additionally, it would have undermined both Turkey-Greece relations and Turkey-EU relations (Nugent, 134).

The second phase, to be elaborated below, witnessed a significant change in the EU strategy of conditionality towards Turkey. This stage starts with the EU Council of Helsinki in December 1999, which conferred official candidate status to Turkey. It should here be stressed that by offering a substantial membership prospect, the EU began to apply positive conditionality to Turkey.

Second Phase: From December 1999 to November 2002

The second phase of EU involvement in the Cyprus issue displays the EU's practice of applying positive conditionality both to Turkey and the GCA while continuing to ignore the TRNC. This period is different from the previous one in the sense that it refers to a shift in the EU strategy towards Turkey. Rather than continuing with its negative conditionality strategy, the EU offered to Turkey a more concrete prospect for membership. In so doing, the EU assumed that such a shift would incite the Turkish government to enact substantial reforms that would align national policies with the EU requirements and to provide greater support to the resolution of the Cyprus problem (Christou, 55).

The second phase of the EU strategy starts with the officialization of Turkey's EU candidature at the Helsinki Council in December 1999. The Council decisions were ambiguous in terms of the EU strategy towards Turkey and Cyprus. The Helsinki Council decisions, on one hand, officialized the EU candidature of Turkey and, on the other, stipulated that the accession negotiations could only be launched when Turkey fully complied with the Copenhagen membership criteria. Furthermore, within the framework of pre-accession strategy, under the heading of the "strengthened political dialogue", Turkey was invited to give stronger support to the resolution of the Cyprus problem under the UN aegis.³⁴ Finally, the Council highlighted the necessity for Turkey to solve any existing conflict with its neighbours prior to its EU membership.³⁵ The Council's explicit emphasis on the Cyprus problem led the Turkish government to question the relevance of all the Cyprus-related prerequisites to the Turkish membership. Before accepting the official candidate status, the Turkish Prime Minister, Bülent Ecevit sent the Finnish Presidency of the EU Council a letter asking whether the resolution of the Cyprus question would be set as a precondition for

Turkey's accession to the Union. After having received, albeit unofficial, reassurance from the Finnish Prime Minister that Cyprus was not a precondition for the Turkish accession, the Turkish government accepted the official candidacy status.³⁶

Nevertheless, the controversy continued during the preparation of the Accession Partnership document for Turkey. In the first draft of the document, the Cyprus question was considered by the EU as a short-term political priority for Turkey.³⁷ However, due to the protests of the Turkish government, the Cyprus question was left out of the short-term priority list (Firat, 359). However, it is crucial to underline here that the link between the Cyprus question and Turkey's EU membership thus started to be consolidated through official EU documents.³⁸

As to the GCA, the Helsinki Council decision enshrined in article 9(b) was also ambiguous.³⁹ The article 9(b) of the Helsinki Council decision stated that

[t]he European Council underlines that a political settlement will facilitate the accession of Cyprus to the European Union. If no settlement has been reached by the completion of accession negotiations, the Council's decision on accession will be made without the above being a precondition. In this the Council will take account of all relevant factors.⁴⁰

The last sentence of article 9(b) of the Helsinki Council was conveniently perceived by the GCA and Greece to indicate that it was sufficient for the GCA leadership to show willingness to find a solution and there was no urge to actually solve the problem (Brewin).

Political Developments and the Evaluation of EU Strategy in the Second Phase

Throughout the second phase, Turkey negotiated to undertake significant reforms, including those in relation to the civilian control of the military and the abolition of the death penalty, in order to comply with the EU criteria, which would have contributed to democratization.⁴¹ In this context, the traditional Cyprus policy of Turkey inevitably started to be questioned on the political elite level. For instance, the Deputy Prime Minister Mesut Yılmaz criticized Turkey for pursuing old-fashioned policies derived from a historical fear, the Sevres syndrome.⁴² By the

same token, although Denктаş was reelected as the TRNC “President” on 15 April 2000 with a landslide victory against his rival Mehmet Ali Talat.⁴³ Yılmaz attacked the traditional stance of Denктаş as “intransigent”.⁴⁴

In this period, Turkey and the TRNC took initiatives to motivate inter-communal talks under the UN aegis. Upon Denктаş’s proposition backed by Turkey, the two Cypriot leaders agreed to participate in face-to-face meetings for the first time since 1997. The TRNC leader made it explicit that his proposition was intended to improve Turkey-EU relations.⁴⁵ However, despite the attempted reinvigoration, the deadlock in the UN negotiations persisted. Furthermore, the debates over the prospects for the integration between Turkey and the TRNC as a reaction to the accession of the GCA to the EU heated up in spite of the EU protests.⁴⁶ In the face of these developments, the efficiency of the EU strategy in terms of political outcome remained negligible, since the impasse in the UN-led inter-communal negotiations was not resolved. However, in terms of affecting the political initiatives, the EU strategy proved efficient, as it convinced Turkey to develop joint efforts with the TRNC to resume the face-to-face talks under UN auspices, as well as to inspire Turkey to reconsider its traditional stance on the Cyprus issue.

Third Phase: From 2002 To Present

The third and the last phase in the development of the EU’s Cyprus strategy opened with the introduction of the UN backed Annan plan, which foresaw the unification of Greek and Turkish Cypriot communities before the accession of Cyprus to the EU. During this period, the EU gave active support to the Annan Plan while continuing positive conditionality towards Turkey and the GCA. The most important novelty in this era was the visibility of “Northern Cyprus” on the EU agenda. The EU offered economic incentives to the Turkish Cypriot community in return for their approval of the Annan Plan. The government changes that took place in Turkey, the TRNC and the GCA throughout the third phase affected the efficiency of the EU strategy. On the one hand, the rise of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) as a single-party government in Turkey and the victory of the pro-EU politician Mehmet Ali Talat over Denктаş facilitated the EU’s success in mobilizing the pro-EU forces in both Turkey and Northern Cyprus. On the other hand, on the Greek Cypriot side, a more conservative leader Tasas Papadopoulos won the general

elections. Papadopoulos's victory soon proved to be a force that would render it more difficult for the EU and the UN to persuade Greek Cypriots to support reunification before 1 May 2004, the date set for the fifth EU enlargement.

During the third phase, as exhibited in its explicit support in consecutive EU Council decisions, the EU bolstered the Annan Plan. Furthermore, the EU announced that it was ready to grant temporary derogatory rights to the Turkish Cypriot community on basic EU principles of free movement in accordance with the Annan Plan.⁴⁷ Together with the Turkish and Greek officials, the EU representative participated in the inter-communal negotiations in Bürgenstock, and provided technical assistance to the UN.⁴⁸ Finally, the EU promised financial assistance for facilitating the implementation of the Annan Plan once the reunification took place.⁴⁹

In addition, the EU continued to apply positive conditionality both to Turkey and the GCA. On 20 June 2003, the EU Council of Thessaloniki "urge[d] all parties concerned, and in particular Turkey and the Turkish Cypriot leadership, to strongly support the UN Secretary General's efforts, and, in this context, call[ed] for an early resumption of the talks on the basis of his proposals".⁵⁰ The Council's emphasis on Turkey and the Turkish Cypriot leadership was important as it implied that the EU continued to assume that a change in the attitude of the Turkish parties would be a priority in the resolution of Cyprus problem. Accordingly, on 5 November 2003, both the EU Strategy Document and the Commission Progress Report issued for the candidate states confirmed that the GCA would become an EU member on 1 May 2004, while highlighting the fact that failure to resolve the political problem before that date might hinder Turkey's accession to the Union.⁵¹

The most significant novelty in the EU strategy was that the EU considered the Turkish Cypriot leadership explicitly as an entity separate from Turkey. In line with the decisions of the EU Council of Seville on 22 June 2002, facilitating the economic development of Northern Cyprus was added to the EU agenda. In this context, the European Commission promised financial assistance for economic development - in particular for improving the infrastructure in relation to water, waste, and transport management - and the overhaul of civil society in Northern Cyprus. Concerning commercial relations, under the condition of reunification with the GCA, it was proposed that the Turkish Cypriot Chamber of

Commerce should become involved in the issuing of movement certificates. Finally, the EU promised an additional financial package, amounting to 259 million Euros, to the Turkish Cypriot community to be opened in the event of settlement. In this sense, the EU “sen[t] a clear political signal of support to the Turkish Cypriot community through [those] measures”.⁵² Finally, the Council of Europe took initiatives to organize a round table meeting among the political parties of both the TRNC and the GCA on 7 July 2003.⁵³

Political Developments and the Evaluation of the EU Strategy

Turkey gave explicit support to the UN Plan. The Commission’s Progress Report of 2004 on Turkey confirmed the explicit support of the Turkish government for the UN Plan and for the referendum “calling the Turkish Cypriot community to a yes vote to the plan”.⁵⁴ At this point, the ideological gap between the Turkish government and the Turkish Cypriot leadership widened. The criticisms against the uncompromising position of Denktaş⁵⁵ were backed by the new Turkish government. Subsequently, under pressures from both the Turkish government and the Turkish Cypriot opposition, Denktaş agreed to negotiate the UN’s Annan Plan, although he had previously declared his total opposition to it.⁵⁶ Furthermore, the Turkish government agreed to pay the compensation incurred by the Loizidou case as decided by the ECHR in 1998. This decision was revolutionary in the sense that, within five years of the Court judgment, consecutive Turkish governments had refused to acknowledge the Court’s sentence, considering it a political act rather than a legal one.⁵⁷

On the eve of the Annan-Plan referenda, the three parties of the Cyprus conflict took initiatives demonstrating good will. For instance, the Turkish Cypriot leadership opened the Green Line on 24 April 2004 as a step to encourage cross-border mobility.⁵⁸ On 30 April 2004, the GCA responded by announcing the introduction of measures to improve cooperation between Turkish and Greek Cypriots regarding various domains such as employment, commerce, medical services, culture and heritage rights. Accordingly, Turkish Cypriots were allowed to work and live in southern Cyprus from 1 May 2004. Finally, the GCA allowed the promotion of education in the Turkish language in southern Cypriot schools.⁵⁹ For its part, Turkey reciprocally announced its willingness to

contribute to the developing peaceful atmosphere in Cyprus and eased the visa procedures for Greek Cypriots, starting from 22 May 2004.⁶⁰

It is plausible to argue that the EU conditionality contributed substantially to the developments cited above. However, the impasse in the UN negotiations persisted. The UN Plan was amended 5 times upon various requests from each party but no final agreement was reached. The UN Secretary-General proposed to put the Plan to referenda in the two Cypriot territories. The results of the Greek Cypriot referendum were disappointing for both the UN and the EU: under a heavy campaign of “no” backed by the Greek Cypriot leader, 75.83% of Greek Cypriot voters rejected the reunification plan, whereas 64.91% of the Turkish Cypriot voters accepted it. Subsequently, Cyprus became an EU member on 1 May 2004 without any resolution of the political problem and Northern Cyprus was left out of the EU.

The EU commissioner for enlargement, Gunther Verheugen accused the Greek Cypriot leader of deceiving the EU and preventing a viable historical solution to the Cyprus problem in compliance with the UN plan.⁶¹ Only one week after the failure of the Annan Plan, the GCA became a EU member and the EU lost its leverage in the Cyprus problem granted by the conditionality principal. Under the newly emerged conditions, the GCA became significantly less willing to renegotiate reunification with Turkish Cyprus. In July 2005, Papadopoulos announced that he would not support the UN Plan without at least 25 substantial amendments, including the total withdrawal of the soldiers from Northern Cyprus and the annulment of Turkey’s guarantorship.⁶² As the UN Secretary-General later testified, the disappointed Turkish Cypriot side was hesitant when faced with the option of reopening of the negotiations for the plan. Consequently, the impasse in Cyprus remained unresolved. As a last attempt to work out a solution on the island, the UN Secretary-General advised the EU to support the economic development of the Turkish Cypriot community.⁶³

With the accession of the GCA to the Union, the EU has become a key actor in the Cyprus problem along with the UN. However, the EU has made it clear that it would not substitute the UN as a forum for negotiations on the Cyprus conflict and called the Cypriot communities to continue to support the UN efforts.⁶⁴ Also, as the pro-reunification stance of Turkish Cypriots was confirmed, in order to support the pro-EU forces in Northern Cyprus, the EU decided to grant the promised amount of 259

million Euros to the Turkish Cypriot community. It would be an appropriate move to facilitate economic integration and other exchanges between the two Cypriot communities.⁶⁵ The legislative elections of 20 February 2005 in Northern Cyprus demonstrated a still-increasing support for the pro-EU party of Talat, who one month was elected President of the TRNC. Within this context, the EU strategy of offering economic incentives to the Turkish Cypriot community is likely to continue in the future. This would contribute to the conception of Northern Cyprus as a separate actor from Turkey.

As to Turkey, Verheugen underlined that the EU was successful in the sense that a traditional “domain réservé” such as Cyprus had been opened to negotiation in Turkey.⁶⁶ Turkey had fulfilled the political condition of supporting the UN efforts in Cyprus. Hence, upon the recommendation by the Commission,⁶⁷ the European Council of Brussels decided to open accession negotiations with Turkey.⁶⁸ However, the opening of the negotiations was conditional on the expansion of the customs union agreement to the new EU member states, including Cyprus. In this way, the EU continued its positive conditionality strategy towards Turkey. In this context, on 29 July 2005 the Turkish government signed the additional protocol expanding the customs union to all EU member states but excluded Cyprus with an annex. The EU responded with a counter-declaration stating that Turkey’s annexed declaration had no legal effect on its obligations to recognize Cyprus and normalize its bilateral relations with it.⁶⁹ As a reaction to Turkey’s refusal, on 11 December 2006 the EU decided to suspend negotiations on eight chapters - namely the free movement of goods, right of establishment and freedom to provide services, financial services, agriculture and rural development, fisheries, transport policy, customs union, and external relations - and not to close any of the remaining chapters until Turkey has fulfilled its commitments under the Additional Protocol to the EU-Turkey Association Agreement and removed the restrictions with regard to the Republic of Cyprus.⁷⁰ This last step shows that at the end of the third phase, the EU has returned to negative conditionality towards Turkey by adopting a threatening discourse and emphasising the possibility of suspending bilateral relations. The section below will deal with the response of the Turkish political elite to the above-mentioned variations in the EU strategy towards Turkey.

The Concept of Euro-Skepticism

Euro-skepticism could be defined as “the idea of contingent or qualified opposition, as well as incorporating outright and unqualified opposition to the process of European integration”.⁷¹ According to this formula, Euro-skepticism is comprised of two elements, hard and soft Euro-skepticisms. Hard Euro-skepticism stands for the “outright” and “unqualified” refusal of European integration both in economic and political terms right from the very beginning. Therefore, the hard Euro-skeptics reject becoming a EU member, since they never desire to be a part of such a Union. Soft Euro-skepticism, on the other hand foresees a “contingent and qualified opposition to European integration.” Soft Euro-skeptics are generally in favor of EU membership, but oppose the EU integration due to two main factors. Either, they reject a specific policy during the integration process or they oppose the integration in part with the motivation of preserving their national interests.⁷²

Euro-skepticism is mainly developed within political parties. In this respect, there are three assumptions with regard to the relation between political parties and Euro-skepticism. First, Euro-skeptic policies are mainly adopted by opposition parties in order to exert pressure upon governments (Taggart and Szczerbiak, 4). Second, not only peripheral but also mainstream parties might pursue Euro-skeptic policies.⁷³ Finally, the ideology of parties is not a determinant in the adoption of Euro-skepticism (Taggart and Szczerbiak, 4). A far right party and a leftist party might pursue Euro-skeptic policies at the same time. In this article, the applicability of Euro-skepticism to the Turkish case will be evaluated along with a discussion on the validity of these three assumptions considering the responses of the Turkish political parties to the Cyprus policy of the EU.

The Responses of the Turkish Political Elite

Concerning the analysis of the Turkish political elite’s responses to the EU policy on Cyprus, the first and second phases should be treated together, because although the EU’s Cyprus strategy indicates certain changes between the two phases, the Turkish political elite’s responses, whether from the government or opposition, reflected a unified image.

The First and Second Phases

As the integration process of the GCA with the EU became visible in the mid 1990s, Turkey hardened its rhetoric on Cyprus membership and formulated its course of action. Accordingly, the Turkish government claimed that the initiation of the accession negotiations with the GCA was in contravention of the 1959-1960 London and Zurich treaties, which were the founding treaties of the Republic of Cyprus. Equally, the unilateral accession of the GCA to the EU would hamper the solution of the Cyprus problem. If the GCA's membership was concluded, the Turkish government firmly stated that options of Turkey's integration with the TRNC would be considered.

This policy stance was preserved both on the government and opposition level. The Minister of Foreign Affairs and leader of the Social Democratic Populist Party (SHP), Murat Karayalçın, who was accused by the opposition of consenting to EU membership for the GCA for the sake of joining the Customs Union, stated that his government never pursued such a policy but sent a declaration to the EU informing that Turkey would be integrated with the TRNC in the case of the EU membership of the GCA.⁷⁴ Right before the Customs Union agreement, Turkish political parties discussed the issue in the Parliament and all the parties expressed their stances. Accordingly, the major coalition partner, the True Path Party (DYP) emphasized the importance of Cyprus for Turkey and stated that Turkey would never sacrifice Cyprus for the Customs-Union membership.⁷⁵ Concerning the opposition parties, the Motherland Party (ANAP) also dwelt on the argument that Turkey should not give up on Cyprus as a concession in return for EU membership.⁷⁶ Bülent Ecevit, the leader of the Democratic Left Party (DSP) claimed that Turkey should not let Cyprus to be integrated with the EU without Turkey being a EU member, even if a solution to the Cyprus problem was achieved beforehand.⁷⁷ Finally, Muhsin Yazıcıoğlu, the leader of the Great Unity Party (BBP) claimed that Turkey's integration with the TRNC should have already been completed given the prospect of the GCA's EU membership. In this respect, he urged the immediate initiation of a security pact between Turkey and the TRNC.⁷⁸

Previously, in the EU Summit of Luxembourg, the Turkish government was eager to send firm messages to the EU that Turkey did not endorse the EU's policy towards Cyprus. In a meeting with EU members in Rome in late January 1997, the Minister of Foreign Affairs

and the leader of DYP Tansu Çiller stated that Turkey was concerned over the commencement of the accession negotiations with the GCA, which would certainly hamper the chances for a solution to the Cyprus problem.⁷⁹ Subsequently, in several joint declarations, Turkey and the TRNC stated that the initiation of accession negotiations with the GCA was in contravention of the 1959-1960 London and Zurich treaties. They also stated that it would render the inter-communal talks obsolete and thus hamper a solution to the Cyprus Problem. In this respect, they emphasized that in response to the integration of the GCA to the EU, the TRNC would be integrated with Turkey in the fields of economics, finance, defense and foreign policy.⁸⁰ An important development in this regard was that Süleyman Demirel, as the President of Turkey, declared his stance on the Cyprus problem, which was, unsurprisingly, similar to the rest of the Turkish political elite.

Although the Turkish government sent a firm message to the EU concerning its Cyprus policy, the EU decided to start accession negotiations with the GCA in Luxembourg in December 1997. In response, Turkey issued a declaration again stating that the decision of the EU concerning the GCA defied the 1959 London and Zurich treaties prohibiting Cyprus from being a member of an organization in which Turkey and Greece as guarantors were not members. The statement also declared that according to the 1960 Treaty of Guarantee, Cyprus could not be integrated economically into another state partially or completely. Moreover, Turkey argued that this decision seriously damaged the efforts for a coherent solution on the island and ultimately served as a viable ground for the GCA to be unified with Greece. Finally, Turkey reiterated its resolve to be integrated with the TRNC in the case of an initiation of accession negotiations between the EU and the GCA.⁸¹

After the Luxembourg summit, Mesut Yılmaz, the Turkish Prime Minister decided to “freeze” political relations with the EU. Yılmaz asserted in a press conference that given the discriminatory attitudes of the EU towards Turkey in Luxembourg, it became an undeniable necessity for Turkey to revise its foreign policy priorities.⁸² During this term, the US special envoy, Richard Holbrooke also admitted that the efforts to revive inter-communal talks in Cyprus became futile, mostly because of the EU’s insensitivity to Turkey’s concerns over Cyprus.⁸³ The EU reiterated its policy of rejecting candidate status to Turkey at the Cardiff Summit and Yılmaz overtly stated Turkey’s resolution to keep its

relations with the EU “frozen”.⁸⁴ He blamed the EU for “deliberately misleading” Ankara “for years” over its future role in Europe.⁸⁵ During this period, Turkey and the TRNC took a significant step to indicate their willingness to pursue integration by signing the treaty of Association Council on August 16, 1998.⁸⁶

After the 1999 elections, the DSP, led by Bülent Ecevit, formed a government in coalition with the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) and ANAP. The new government adopted the existing Cyprus policy of Turkey. As in 1995, not only the government but also the opposition embraced this policy, which enabled Turkey to achieve a unified voice on the Cyprus problem. The political parties represented in the Parliament, namely DSP, MHP, Virtue Party (FP), ANAP and DYP issued a joint declaration on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the Turkish military intervention in Cyprus and stated their attachment to Turkey’s Cyprus policy and the military presence of Turkey on the island.⁸⁷ Concerning the Cyprus problem, Prime Minister Ecevit was of the opinion that the Cyprus problem had already been resolved after the Turkish military intervention in 1974.⁸⁸ İsmail Cem, the Turkish Foreign Minister stated that it was vital for Turkey to preserve the integrity of the TRNC and that Turkey would accept no other solution for the Cyprus problem.⁸⁹ Şükrü Sina Gürel, the Minister of State argued that the EU was blackmailing Turkey by putting forward the Cyprus problem as a condition for Turkey’s EU membership.⁹⁰ He also firmly stated that Turkey would immediately be integrated with the TRNC, if the GCA became a EU member.⁹¹

To conclude, during the first and the second phases, the Turkish political elite, namely the president, government and opposition in a unified fashion adopted a hard-line policy towards the EU concerning the Cyprus problem. Considering Cyprus as Turkey’s top foreign policy issue, the Turkish political elite did not pay attention to the dangers of this policy stance for Turkey’s EU membership prospects. In this sense, it could be argued that the EU’s Cyprus policy and the significance of Cyprus for Turkey resulted in the adoption of a Soft Euro-skeptic policy among the Turkish political elite, because Turkey saw the EU’s Cyprus policy as a threat to its national interests and thus chose to give a strong reaction to the EU. Therefore, the Turkish opposition could be counted as “qualified”, since Turkey reacted in a way aimed to guard its national interests. It could also be seen as “contingent”, since Turkey’s opposition

was influenced by the EU's attitude, meaning that if the EU adjusted its Cyprus policy accordingly, Turkey would withdraw its opposition. Nevertheless, the intensity of the Turkish opposition was so considerable that Turkey even implied to terminate all its EU membership aspirations and to be integrated with the TRNC. The significance of these two phases is that all major political parties in Turkey were unified in spelling out one single, coherent Cyprus policy. Hence, it could be argued in this sense that Soft Euro-skepticism with the motivation of preserving national interests became the dominant paradigm in Turkey's EU policy during the first and second phases.

The Third Phase

The traditional Cyprus policy of Turkey and Soft Euro-skepticism against the EU gave way to a significant Euro-enthusiasm during the third phase. Having won the 2002 elections with a landslide victory, the Justice and Development Party (AKP) adopted Turkey's EU membership policy as its top priority. At the same time, the AKP came up with a very ambitious plan to resolve the Cyprus problem, which had haunted Turkey's foreign policy agenda for decades. A shift of rhetoric on the government level thus became visible in Turkey. Consequent to the presentation of its program to the Parliament, the AKP government declared its determination to make pro-active efforts towards achieving a viable settlement in Cyprus.⁹² On November 21, 2002, AKP leader Tayyip Erdoğan announced that they were not going to act as hawks in Turkey's Cyprus policy.⁹³ Erdoğan also declared that no solution was not a solution in the Cyprus problem.⁹⁴ In its Cyprus policy formulation, contrary to the previous Turkish governments, the AKP government did not reject a link between the Cyprus question and Turkey's EU membership. Accordingly, the AKP government gave explicit support to the Annan Plan and Mehmet Ali Talat, the pro-EU Turkish Cypriot leader who defeated Denktaş in the general elections. However, the AKP underestimated the Greek Cypriot resentment towards the Annan Plan. The results of the referenda on the island overrode the unification of Cyprus and further isolated the TRNC, while enabling the GCA to become a EU member unilaterally.

In the aftermath of the referenda, the AKP government conducted alternative policies to end the political isolation of Turkish Cypriot community. For instance, the AKP persuaded Azerbaijan to initiate direct

flights to Ercan Airport in the TRNC. Moreover, Abdullah Gül, the Minister of Foreign Affairs issued an action plan for Cyprus, promising to open Turkey's harbors and airspace to the GCA provided that the political and economic isolation of the TRNC from international society would end.⁹⁵ However, these policies were far from fruitful, since the GCA was already recognized as the sole representative of the island and had been granted all the EU membership rights. The TRNC was still seen as a *de facto* rather than *de jure* state by the EU. Furthermore, the EU rejected Gül's proposition and suspended the accession negotiations with Turkey in relation to eight chapters. Turkey refused to open its airspace and harbors to the GCA, a EU member.

With its Euro-enthusiasm, the AKP succeeded in deconstructing the government-based soft Euro-skepticism of Turkey and pursued a solution-based Cyprus policy. However, even this policy proved insufficient to resolve the Cyprus impasse and finally, the AKP had to return to Turkey's traditional policy stance by rejecting an informal recognition of the GCA. During the third phase, the soft Euro-skepticism endured on the opposition level. The main opposition party, the Republican People's Party (CHP) led by Deniz Baykal, and the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) led by Devlet Bahçeli, mainly remained attached to the traditional Cyprus policy of Turkey.

The CHP

The CHP is the oldest political party in Turkey and throughout the three phases elaborated in this study Social Democracy has been its main ideology. The party mainly endorses the EU membership of Turkey. The top party officials base their support for EU membership on the Ankara Association Agreement of 1963 signed by İsmet İnönü, the Turkish Prime Minister and CHP leader. On the other hand, while supporting Turkey's EU membership, the CHP raises strong criticisms against the EU and the AKP with the apprehension that their policies might threaten the national interests of Turkey. Concerning the Cyprus problem, the CHP's stance is shaped by such strong criticism.

During the third phase, the CHP has remained as the main opposition party in the Turkish parliament, and given the active policy of the AKP on Cyprus, the CHP officials have tended to defend the traditional Cyprus policy of Turkey. The responses of the CHP officials could be seen as threefold. First, the CHP opposed the link between the Cyprus problem

and Turkey's EU membership process. It was their preoccupation that in order to become a EU member, Turkey would be forced by the EU to officially recognize the GCA when it acceded to the Union. Second, the CHP criticized the substance of the Annan Plan, which would eliminate the bi-zonality established since 1974. The CHP officials claimed that it was the bi-zonality which provided peace and stability in the island. If the Plan was accepted, this stability would be distorted and Turkish Cypriots would be confined to minority status.⁹⁶ Their final criticism was against the Cyprus policy of the AKP. The party officials blamed the AKP for changing the traditional and rightful Cyprus policy of Turkey for the sake of entering the EU.⁹⁷

After the referenda, the CHP claimed that the rejection of the Annan plan provided a viable ground for Turkey to lobby for the international recognition of the TRNC, but the AKP government did not take this offer seriously. Deniz Baykal, the CHP leader still insists on the preservation of the two-state model in order to maintain peace and order in Cyprus.⁹⁸ Nevertheless, unlike the political elite in the first and the second phases, the CHP has not offered integration with the TRN as a solution. Still, it has insisted on the survival of the TRNC.

The persistent attachment of the CHP to the traditional Cyprus policy of Turkey is mainly due to the fact that it was the former top officials of the CHP who had developed the very idea of Turkey's Cyprus policy. İsmet İnönü challenged the infamous letter of the US President Lyndon Johnson in 1964, and Bülent Ecevit ordered the implementation of military intervention in Cyprus in 1974. Both figures were the Prime Ministers and the leaders of the CHP. The official Cyprus policy of Turkey was developed with reference to these policy stances of the two leaders. In this respect, it is reasonable that the CHP tended to preserve this traditional policy against the actions of the AKP.⁹⁹

The Cyprus policy of the CHP has also been shared, to a great extent, by the CHP deputies in the Parliament. According to the questionnaire survey conducted by the authors of this article, among the CHP deputies from November 2005 to May 2006, 102 out of 154 deputies answered two questions on Cyprus. As regards to the question "what is the most important foreign policy issue for Turkey?", 44% of the respondents chose the Cyprus problem as their answer, while 31% said Northern Iraq and 18% the Armenian question. Hence, the Cyprus problem has appeared on the top of the CHP deputies' agenda and it has been treated

as an issue even more important than the Northern Iraq problem, which is deemed to be directly related to PKK terrorism in Turkey. Concerning the question “what will be the repercussions of the Greek Cypriot Administration’s entry to the EU?”, 53% of the CHP deputies responded that the EU would endorse the Greek Cypriot position and for that reason, the Cyprus problem would never be solved and Turkey’s accession to the EU would be barred. 16% answered that in order to adhere to the EU, Turkey would have to recognize the Greek Cypriot administration as the “Republic of Cyprus”, withdraw its recognition of the TRNC, and would in the end acquiesce in qualifying Turkish Cypriots as a minority in Cyprus. Finally, 14% replied that this will lead to the recognition of the TRNC and the Cyprus impediment to Turkey’s EU membership process would thus be overcome. Accordingly, an overwhelming majority of the respondents reflect a pessimistic view on both the Cyprus question and Turkey’s EU membership. More than half of the CHP deputies believed that the GCA’s EU membership would eventually hamper the solution of the Cyprus problem and Turkey’s EU membership. What is striking here, is that a quarter of the respondents believed that for the sake of EU membership, the GCA would be recognized as “the Republic of Cyprus” and the TRNC would be undermined by Turkey. On the other hand, another quarter of CHP deputies optimistically claimed that this would lead to the recognition of the TRNC and Turkey would no longer suffer from the Cyprus problem in the conduct of its EU membership process.

The MHP

The MHP is another well-experienced political party in Turkey founded in the late 1960s. As a far right political party, the MHP does not conceal its negative sentiments towards the EU, since its top officials claim that there are “ulterior motives in the EU for Turkey”. However, the MHP leaders at the same time keep their European vocation.¹⁰⁰ The MHP officials currently assert that the party, in fact, supports the EU membership of Turkey. However, in doing that, the MHP puts forward a vital precondition for its support, which is the guarantee for securing Turkey’s national, political and territorial integrity.¹⁰¹ This precondition lay at the heart of the MHP’s strong criticisms directed against the EU and the AKP. The party officials claim that the national integrity of Turkey has always been undermined by the policies of the EU and the AKP.¹⁰²

Although the MHP did not gain any seats in the parliament in the 2002 elections, it is currently the second largest opposition party in the Turkish Assembly. An influential far right party in Turkey, the MHP bolsters the traditional Cyprus policy of Turkey and sees it as a national cause. It maintains the view that the London and Zurich Agreements are still the determiners of the fate of Cyprus, and the EU membership of the GCA is in contravention of these treaties. Besides, the MHP does not believe that the Annan Plan carries sufficient credibility to resolve the problem, as it poses fundamental threats for the future of the Turkish Cypriot community.¹⁰³

According to the MHP, the Cyprus problem has always been used by Greece as veto leverage against Turkey's EU membership aspirations. Moreover, the MHP believes that after the GCA was granted a clear membership perspective, both Greece and the GCA developed the ability to drag the EU on their side in the issue of Cyprus. The MHP claims that Greece and the GCA aim to achieve *Enosis*, union with motherland, through the EU. Hence, according to the MHP, the EU's favorable attitude towards the GCA, and its discrimination against Turkey strengthened the position of Greece and the GCA on the Cyprus problem. The MHP also criticizes the policies of Turkey during the Customs Union talks in which, the MHP claims, the Turkish government failed to show sufficient reaction to the EU membership candidature of the GCA for the sake of completing the Customs Union negotiations.¹⁰⁴

The MHP asserts that while formulating its attitudes towards Turkey, the EU assumes that the EU membership perspective is deemed to be the most important foreign policy priority by Turkey and, in this respect, believes that Cyprus problem could be subordinated to Turkey's EU membership process. Within this context, according to the MHP, the Cyprus policy of the AKP justifies this assumption of the EU, since the AKP attaches more importance to EU membership than to the Cyprus problem itself. The MHP believes that the Turkish decision-makers gained an advantageous position when they threatened to integrate with the TRNC in the case of GCA membership. This determination forced the EU officials to feel uneasy and cautious about their next move on the Cyprus problem. However, in the sequence, the policies conducted by the AKP sacrificed Cyprus for a still vague promise of EU membership and destroyed this advantageous position.¹⁰⁵ In its progress reports issued for the candidate states, beginning from 2004, the EU has demanded that

Turkey withdraw its veto against the GCA for NATO membership and open its harbors and airspace to the GCA. According to the MHP, the EU has been implicitly demanding that Turkey should recognize the GCA as the Republic of Cyprus and has ignored the rights and liberties of the Turkish Cypriot Community.¹⁰⁶

After the referenda in Cyprus, the MHP leader Devlet Bahçeli accused the AKP government of forcing Turkish Cypriots to vote in favor of the Annan Plan in order to eliminate the Cyprus obstacle from Turkey's path to EU membership once and for all.¹⁰⁷ He also claimed that the Greek Cypriots' "No" and the EU's willingness to grant the GCA an EU membership, with or without a solution on the island, reveals clearly the insincerity of the EU in this matter. Yet, in order to find a comprehensive solution, the MHP offers its own proposals. These proposals suggest either integration with Turkey or the protection of the independence of the TRNC as a separate state.¹⁰⁸ Therefore, similar to the CHP stance, the MHP considers Cyprus as an issue more important than Turkey's EU membership and rejects the plans for solving the problem through the EU. In this regard, no different than the political elite of the first and the second phases, the MHP offers the integration of the TRNC with Turkey as a viable solution to the problem.

In conclusion, when the responses of the CHP and the MHP to the EU policy on Cyprus are evaluated together, it is possible to observe that both parties display similar standpoints. Accordingly, both parties - at least in rhetoric - are in favor of Turkey's EU membership while maintaining concerns with the motivation of preserving Turkey's national interests. Concerning Cyprus, both the CHP and the MHP are inclined to defend the traditional policy of Turkey. The Cyprus policies of both the EU and the AKP have provoked strong criticisms within both parties. In this sense, it could be reasonable to state that both opposition parties have adopted a soft Euro-skepticism in shaping their Cyprus policies. Their opposition is "qualified", since they oppose a certain policy area, which is the Cyprus policy of the EU, and raise their concerns over national interests. Their opposition is also "contingent" since their support for the EU membership depends on the condition that the EU should not become a hurdle to the solution of the Cyprus problem.

Conclusion

Considering the EU's conditionality strategy on the Cyprus problem, the Turkish political elite's responses are crucial in terms of measuring the importance that Turkey attaches to the Cyprus problem. During the first phase, both opposition and government in Turkey were unified in their reactions to the negative EU conditionality. They attached more importance to the Cyprus issue than to Turkey's EU membership and they even presented an image of being willing to withdraw from the EU membership process if the EU continued with its Cyprus policy. In the second phase, the EU conditionality on Turkey shifted from negative to positive, as Turkey was finally granted candidature by the EU. However, Turkey's candidature was not instrumental in changing the stance of the Turkish elite on Cyprus, since the EU continued to apply positive conditionality to the GCA. During this phase, both opposition and government conveyed the same unified messages to the EU: that Turkey might even consider the option of being integrated with the TRNC.

The landslide victory of the AKP in Turkey was a turning point for Turkey's Cyprus policy, since the AKP decided to pursue a solution-based Cyprus policy with the motivation of strengthening Turkey's EU membership perspective. Hence, during the final phase, Turkey has changed its Cyprus policy stance, although on the opposition level the traditional view on Cyprus was maintained. However, the shift in Turkey's Cyprus policy was not enough to resolve the Cyprus problem. After the GCA became a EU member, Turkey was forced by the EU to open its air space and harbors to the GCA. In this regard, it is observed that the EU has returned to its negative conditionality on Turkey and stressed the obligation to eventually recognize the GCA as the Republic of Cyprus. In response to the negative conditionality, the AKP could no longer continue its new Cyprus policy and had to return to the traditional stance of Turkey on Cyprus. In his latest press statement on the issue, Tayyip Erdoğan, Turkish Prime Minister and the AKP leader has declared that they would not tolerate the double standard concerning the Cyprus problem and its implications for Turkey's EU membership process. He has even stated that given the current situation, if Turkey's EU membership might be overridden by the EU at some point, then the EU should fulfill its responsibility to inform Turkey about such an option immediately so that Turkey could draw a new road map without the EU.¹⁰⁹

In order to theorize the Turkish responses, soft Euro-skepticism could be seen instrumental. In this sense, although in favor of the EU membership in essence, the Turkish political elite opposed the Cyprus policy of the EU explicitly with the preoccupation of preserving Turkey's national interests. Consequently, it could be argued that the conditionality policy of the EU towards Turkey and the GCA concerning the Cyprus problem increased the tendencies of the Turkish political elite to tilt towards soft Euro-skepticism. This is not to say that the EU's Cyprus policy was the only determiner of Euro-skepticism in Turkey. The Welfare Party (RP) in 1990s, for instance, was known for its hard Euro-skeptic rhetoric. The RP mainly perceived the EU as a Christian club in which Turkey should never have a place.¹¹⁰ Moreover, the CHP and the MHP have currently raised criticisms against the EU focusing on policy areas other than Cyprus, such as the Kurdish problem and minorities. Be that as it may, since 1993 it has been the EU policies on Cyprus that have strongly affected the attitudes of the Turkish political elite towards the EU. Even the AKP could be deemed to be tilting towards soft Euro-skepticism, as the latest remarks of Erdoğan indicate.

Concerning the three main assumptions of Euro-skepticism in political parties, the first assumption—that Euro-skepticism is an opposition party phenomenon—can only be partly applied to the Turkish case since not only opposition but also almost all the governments in Turkey have adopted a Euro-skeptic stance concerning Cyprus. Nevertheless, especially in the final phase, it has mainly been the opposition, namely the CHP and the MHP who have raised criticisms against the AKP government and its Cyprus policy. The second assumption, which claims that both peripheral and mainstream parties might adopt Euro-skepticism, applies in the Turkish case since both governments and opposition adopted a Euro-skeptic policy against the EU's Cyprus policy. Finally, the last assumption, which suggests that the ideology of parties is not a determinant in the adoption of Euro-skepticism, is also valid for Turkey, as both the CHP, a Social Democrat party, and the MHP, a far right party, defend similar Euro-skeptic rhetoric and policies.

Endnotes

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