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THE EUROPEAN COAL AND STEEL COMMUNITY IS THE ANSWER TO THE DRILLING PROBLEM IN CYPRUS

Where there is a will, there is a perfect way

The Cyprus problem or non-resolution of it that has been haunting the Turkey-European Union (EU) relations for so long. Apart from being the Democles' sword in the aforementioned relations, the problem continues and even evolves to an escalating conflict in the EU itself which would be a bit discreditable for a Union whose most important and successful aspect is being a peace project.

A blame game is useless as both parties are responsible from the current impasse. In the pre-1999 period and almost until 2003 Turkey played a significant role in the intransigence of the Turkish Cypriots for a settlement. On the other hand, the EU had hoped that the incentive of EU membership both to Cyprus and Turkey would work as a "catalyst" for a solution in the island. However accepting Cyprus without a settlement in the Helsinki summit of 1999, where Turkey was announced as a candidate violated this hope as it has seriously weakened the motive for Greek Cypriots to seek for a solution. This weak motive was exhibited in the referenda for the most comprehensive and balanced peace plan, the so called Annan Plan of April 2004. It was rejected the Greek Cypriots and accepted by Turkish Cypriots. Here it is worth remembering the reassurances given by the Finnish Presidency of the EU in Prime Minister Paavo Tapio LIPPONEN's letter to Turkey during the Helsinki summit of 1999. With the capacity of being a rotating president of the

¹ <https://www.tepav.org.tr/en/ekibimiz/s/1139/Nilgun+Arisan+Eralp>

EU in 1999, Mr. LIPPONEN, in his letter addressed to Turkish Government assured that Cyprus question would not be a factor in Turkey's relations with the EU and all relevant factors will be taken into account before the final decision regarding Cyprus' accession will be made.

After Greek Cypriots rejected the Annan Plan which was accepted by Turkish Cypriots in a simultaneous referenda in the island on 24 April 2004, EU's failure to put an end to Turkish Cypriots' isolation completely has been another significant disappointment. Despite EU Council's assertion of Turkish Cypriots' "clear desire for a future within the EU" in 2004 and European Commission's valuable efforts in 2010 to re-initiate direct trade with the northern part of the island – *which failed because of the disagreement between the legal services of the EU institutions fuelled by the Greek Cypriots*- the isolation of Turkish Cypriots continues. It is crystal clear that the Turkish Cypriots are the sole victim of the continuation of the status quo on the Island.

After the unfortunate failure of the Crans-Montana process in July 2017, there has not been a concrete progress towards a resolution. The reason of the failure in Crans-Montana process which took Cyprus closer than ever before to a settlement has not been officially announced and still there is an absence of comprehensive information on this issue. It is generally stated that an agreement could not be attained in the areas of security, guarantees and political equality. However according to some diplomatic sources, the main intransigent party was Greek Cypriots with their insistence on not recognising political equality and effective participation of Turkish Cypriots in decision taking mechanisms. Turkey, unlike before, is stated to be more flexible in terms of guarantees, right of intervention and size of troops on the island.

In the very recent tri-partite meeting of the leaders of Turkish and Greek Cypriot communities with the UN Secretary General António Guterres on 25 November 2019 in Berlin, two leaders had been unable to agree on the terms of reference that would form the basis of new talks. Nevertheless, they agreed that achieving a comprehensive and durable settlement to the Cyprus problem within a foreseeable horizon is of utmost importance to the future well-being of both communities and that the status quo is unsustainable. If a new negotiation process is to be launched, it should be confirmed in advance that the two sides on the Island have a common vision and that they are ready for negotiations on a common ground.

In the meantime, the relatively recent discovery of hydrocarbons in the Eastern Mediterranean had led some circles to hope that the expected revenue from gas exploitation would facilitate a resolution, but alas no! It has only worsened the situation. The Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus and Turkey on one side and the internationally recognized EU member state Cyprus on the other side make competing claims over the extent of respective exclusive economic zones (EEZ) and thus the areas to exploit for natural resources.

Drilling in the eastern Mediterranean has been added to the list of contentious issues and triggered a series of retaliation measures by the EU without any improvement. This has happened in connection with a broader geopolitical rivalry in the eastern Mediterranean. Greece and Cyprus have formed closer ties with Egypt and Israel, leaving Turkey feeling increasingly cornered. Consequently Turkey signed a deal on 27 November with Libya's internationally recognized Government of National Accord aiming to delimit maritime zones in the region.

Last July Turkish Cypriot leader Mustafa AKINCI proposed to the Greek Cypriot leader Nicos ANASTASIADES the establishment of a joint committee for the joint exploration and profit-sharing of hydrocarbon resources through the UN Special Representative Office in Cyprus. Mr. ANASTASIADES rejected this proposal in August and instead, in an informal document, proposed an escrow account that would safeguard 30 % share from the natural gas proceeds for the Turkish Cypriot community. This share will be accrued to Turkish Cypriots after a settlement is reached. This proposal was also conditional upon an end to Turkish drilling and a compromise with Cyprus over its EEZ. It is rejected by Mr. AKINCI as it does not give licensing rights to Turkish Cypriots.

Hence currently there seems to be an unfortunate stalemate and a vicious circle: an agreement on hydrocarbons seems to necessitate a political settlement which requires an agreement on hydrocarbons. A political settlement on Cyprus would go hand in hand with an agreement on hydrocarbons but this does not seem to be feasible at the moment. Greek Cypriots say they cannot engage in negotiations whilst Turkey is violating their sovereign rights. On the other hand, Turkey demands the initiation of settlement negotiations at the end of which Turkish Cypriots would be efficiently included in the decision making mechanisms of Cyprus and the acceptance of hydrocarbons as an element that should be shared and decided jointly with Turkish Cypriots. There should be a way out from this very damaging impasse.

In order to get out of this vicious circle, Greek Cypriots should accept the political equality with the Turkish Cypriots and an efficient joint decision making mechanism which is an integral part of the latter according to established UN parameters. Also Turkey should stop gunboat diplomacy and blackmailing tactics that is thought to trigger future negotiations for a settlement but the result is just the opposite.

With all due respect to its internal solidarity principle the EU should come up with constructive proposals rather than watch the dispute lingering and even escalating and imposing sanctions on Turkey whose counterproductive nature is obvious. Turkey is still there and does not seem to have an intention of changing direction. Unfortunately, almost all through the Cyprus conflict EU has been a passive observer and this attitude continues during the escalation of the problems after the discovery of hydrocarbons.

Cyprus problem is an EU problem as well and the ongoing and escalating nature does not only destabilise the Eastern Mediterranean that is neighbouring an already very instable Middle East, but, it also seriously stains the relevance its soft power. UN and the Secretary-General's Good Offices Mission can be the main way forward for a settlement. But EU also might come up with constructive solution proposals for drilling problem, at least to compensate its past mistakes regarding the solution of "Cyprus Problem".

EU's inaction is quite surprising as it has the best experience of joint management of resources that used to cause very serious conflict between communities and states. The Second World War from 1939 to 1945 came at unprecedented human and economic cost for Europe. The leaders and founding fathers of the EU, five years later than the end of the destructing war decided that pooling coal and steel production – *the essential materials for weapons*- would make war between historic opponents France and Germany "*not merely unthinkable, but materially impossible.*" The French Foreign Minister Robert Schuman

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presented the Schuman Declaration on May 9, 1950, in which he first talked about the creation of the European Community of Steel and Coal (ECSC). Some European and American leaders stated their full support for Schuman's promising ideas for the ECSC. The Schuman Declaration led to the treaty forming the European Community of Steel and Coal (ECSC) in 1952. The ECSC changed Europe by taking control of steel and coal away from national governments, and create shared economic interests, which would not only replace military confrontation, but also assist to increase standards of living and be the first step towards a more united Europe. It paved the way for other areas of comprehensive integration including coal and steel. It had become so successful to be the starting point for the economic and social integration of Europe that first European Economic Community and then the EU had come into being and there remained no need for an ECSC which was dissolved in 2002.

We know that with her "geopolitical European Commission" new European Commission President Ms. Ursula von der LEYEN has a plan to boost the EU's role on the world stage. After taking office, the EU's new High Representative Mr. Joseph BORRELL FONTELLES tweeted that "*the EU has been created as peace project among European nations. Now it is time to be an outward looking actor the vdL Commission will deliver a geopolitical approach linking internal and external policies.*" Why not considering starting with a very serious and escalating internal conflict that might have important implications for the neighbourhood: Cyprus.

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