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**Speech of the General Secretary of the C.C. of AKEL Andros Kyprianou
to the Economic Policy Research Foundation of Turkey (TEPAV)**

***"The geopolitical landscape in the Eastern Mediterranean and the
Cyprus problem"***

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First of all, I would like to thank you for the invitation extended and the opportunity you have given me to outline AKEL's view as regards the geopolitical landscape in the Eastern Mediterranean. I shall, of course, focus on Cyprus and the developments surrounding it.

Our neighborhood, the Eastern Mediterranean, is at the centre of intense geopolitical upheavals, competitions and conflicts that are being accompanied by an unprecedented and dangerous militarization. If we had to distinguish the main elements that determine the new geopolitical scene in the Eastern Mediterranean, we would single out four factors:

Firstly. The discovery of significant hydrocarbons in the Eastern Mediterranean, coupled with wider upheavals that are provoking instability on the global energy market, have opened up tremendous prospects and dangers. It is true that the Eastern Mediterranean is, if not the main, one of the main energy competitions of our era, which will also determine to a significant degree the international balance of power for the coming decades. The attempt to exploit the Eastern Mediterranean's natural gas faces two major challenges. On the one hand, the highly complex technical characteristics of extraction and transport of hydrocarbons. On the other hand, the volatile regional environment and the relations between the region's states. In addition, the importance of the Eastern Mediterranean is also determined by the fact that it constitutes a longstanding key link in the world's maritime trade in the transport of oil.

Secondly. The region's older open problems - such as the Middle East problem, the Cyprus problem, the Kurdish issue - have been interconnected with new issues such as the intervention in Syria, the raid and in effect dissolution of Libya and the activity of the "Islamic State". We all understand that these issues are linked to, or are at least being exploited in the geopolitical and energy rivalries.

A third element is the consequences that have been caused by the "New Middle East" plan which was promoted by the United States over the last decades with

the goal – supposedly – of the democratization of the region's regimes. The results of the plan is chaos, instability and bloodshed that are continuing to this day. The consequences of these plans have influenced and are so far having a chain effect on the whole landscape of the East Mediterranean. It is evident that the current US administration of Donald Trump - with its inflammatory decisions on the Middle East problem and on the international security system as a whole – is pouring oil into the fire.

Fourthly. These competitions are being accompanied by militarization through the strengthening of the presence of foreign powers in the Eastern Mediterranean, successive military exercises and maneuvers, new bases and the forging of new military partnerships which are driving the region's countries into an arms race. Besides, we shouldn't forget that as regards the issue of military equipment, the powerful interests of the arms and weapon industries also exist that have the means to reproduce and exacerbate the vicious circle of militarization and insecurity.

The question is, how do we solve this great mass of interests and dangers? How do we solve them in a way that would favor and serve the peoples of our neighborhood, the cause of peace and cooperation? Our position is that the exploitation of the natural resources of the Eastern Mediterranean can and should proceed according to specific parameters: We believe they should be exploited to the benefit of the peoples with a plan to approach each country's natural wealth as the property of its people, and more specifically energy as public social commodity. These natural resources should become a factor of peace and regional co-operation, inclusive, not a factor of tension and militarization. They should be based on the respect for international law, the law of the sea and the inalienable sovereign rights that arise for every state. For some this all might sound as some romantic sloganeering. However, as AKEL, we believe that this is entirely feasible if the governments of the region realise and are in line with the real interest of their peoples. This is exactly what we propose - a realistic and mutually beneficial path - for the future of our country, Cyprus.

The case of Cyprus is one of the pieces of the puzzle of the Eastern Mediterranean where various interests - economic, geopolitical, energy - interconnect with the complex issue of the Cyprus Problem.

What is the situation today? In Cyprus, the indications of the existence of natural gas reserves in the southern part of the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of the Republic of Cyprus have attracted the interest of big energy giants, but also neighboring states. The Republic of Cyprus has proceeded in recent years to actions for the safeguarding of its sovereign rights. This was pursued with the delimitation of the EEZ's and drawing up of other relevant agreements with neighboring states, as well as through the licensing of explorations in its reserves. Nonetheless, contrary to these plans, there is the policy of the government of Turkey which does not recognize the Republic of Cyprus which disputes these agreements, has not adopted the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, and considers that these plans are aiming to exclude it from the Eastern Mediterranean energy map, and to deprive Turkish Cypriots of the benefits of Cyprus' natural wealth. It is also well-known that last February Turkish ships had

forced the ship-drilling rig of the Italian company Eni to withdraw. At present, the drilling of the American ExxonMobil Company has begun in plot 10, approximately 150 km southwest of the island.

This scene of tension may deteriorate rapidly in the coming months due to two factors: Firstly, Turkey's apparent intention to proceed with drillings within the Cypriot EEZ with all that this action may provoke. Secondly, without talks for a solution of the Cyprus Problem, the danger exists (due to the Trump government's policy on UN peacekeeping missions) of the presence of the UN Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus not being renewed, which has been on the island since 1964 and which since 1974 has been patrolling the buffer zone between the Turkish army and the Cypriot National Guard. This coming January, if there is no negotiating procedure, definitive decisions may be taken for a drastic reduction or withdrawal of the UN Force, with all the dangers this might entail.

What is our position on all these issues and what do we propose? First of all, I have to say that as a Party, and I personally, we have as our inviolable principle not to change our positions and statements according to which audience we address, neither within, nor outside Cyprus. I must also state from this podium that the provocations by Turkish warships in the Cypriot EEZ, the aggressive rhetoric and the intention to conduct drilling within the Cypriot EEZ do not have a legal or political basis and certainly do not contribute to what is proclaimed about peace and cooperation. Furthermore, the concerns that are being expressed by the Turkish Cypriot side that the Greek Cypriots are acting unilaterally are not justified given that the revenues from the natural gas will only emerge after several years when we will be in a position to utilise it and given that the costs of the energy giants involved, amounting to hundreds of millions, are covered. Nonetheless, as AKEL we do not confine ourselves to what divides us and what we disagree with. We propose a path that is the path of peace and cooperation that guarantees the rights of the Turkish Cypriots and at the same time can also safeguard the legitimate concerns of everyone.

To begin with, when Demetris Christofias, my predecessor in the leadership of AKEL, was in the leadership of the Greek Cypriot community and Mehmet Ali Talat in the leadership of the Turkish Cypriot community, it was possible to achieve significant convergences in the intercommunal negotiations on the content of the solution of the Cyprus problem, including on issues relating to maritime zones, natural resources and the distribution of federal revenues. It was agreed that all sea areas, including the EEZ and natural resources issues, would be a competence of the central federal state. This underlines the single sovereignty, unity and international personality of the united Republic of Cyprus, something which is a timeless concern of the Greek Cypriot community. At the same time, this convergence is also beneficial for our Turkish Cypriot compatriots, since the fact that the EEZ and natural resources will constitute a federal competence means that natural gas belongs to both communities regardless of the fact that it was discovered in the southern maritime area of Cyprus. If it is also taken into account that natural gas according to the relative convergence will be included in federal revenues, the distribution of which has already almost been agreed, it becomes clear that this is a mutually beneficial convergence, which is of crucial importance

as to what is happening. It is not by chance that the UN Secretary-General himself has referred to this convergence. Consequently, the rights of Turkish Cypriots are guaranteed.

Secondly, we know that Turkey is seeking to have a position on the region's energy map. This role cannot be acquired through the logic of military imposition and with the law of the mighty, to the detriment of the interests of neighboring states. It can attain this role as the open disputes that exist with its neighbors, including the unresolved issue of the occupation and division of Cyprus, are being solved. As AKEL, we are ready, after the solution of the Cyprus problem, to support a discussion between Cyprus and Turkey to explore according to economic viability criteria the option of constructing a pipeline, both for its own use, as well as for channeling natural gas to Europe.

Regarding the issue of the delimitation of an EEZ between Cyprus and Turkey, this is an issue that obviously can only be discussed after the solution of the Cyprus problem and is not a subject of the negotiations on the Cyprus problem. In any case, however, our view is that the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea is the tool that can give just and lawful solutions to any dispute and challenge.

Thirdly. As AKEL we have a very clear position that the Republic of Cyprus has every right to exercise its sovereign rights and the energy plans stemming from them. Furthermore we also consider that regional and mutually beneficial cooperation with all the countries in the region is welcome. At the same time, however, we have taken a clear stand against the militarization of energy partnerships in the Mediterranean, the military exercises and co-operations of the Republic of Cyprus with Israel, whose army is actually an occupying power for decades now in the Palestinian territories. As AKEL, we have stressed that the cultivation of ideological constructions for the formation of an anti-Turkish axis between Cyprus and Israel and other countries may sound nice to the ears of the nationalist audience, but these logics hide enormous dangers, new cycles of insecurity and, in our view, many illusions. The insecurity that the Greek Cypriots justifiably feel will not be solved by militarization, military co-operations with Israel and NATO forces, let alone by Cyprus' accession to NATO. Respectively, neither the feeling of insecurity felt by the Turkish Cypriots will be solved by a new intensification of militarization on the part of Turkey. Our security is peace. For Cyprus and Cypriots, peace means first and foremost the reunification of the island and its people.

All these makes it therefore indisputable that the solution of the Cyprus problem on the basis of the agreed framework and the parameters of the UN is a pressing need. This is the only way to unlock and deescalate the situation. Only the solution of the Cyprus problem will turn the dangers into a perspective for our peoples and countries and the region in general. This is what we hope the Turkish government will also realize.

As AKEL, we insist with consistency and unwaveringly that today the priority is the resumption of the talks on the Cyprus problem from the point where they had remained at Crans Montana, on the basis of the Guterres Framework. That is why we are encouraging the leaders of the two communities of Cyprus, Mr.

Anastasiades and Mr. Akinci to respond positively to the UN Secretary-General's calls so that the terms of reference and the resumption of the negotiations are agreed. That is where Turkey too will for sure also be judged. We have no time to waste or to open up issues that are already agreed. We cannot also think about or accept any deviation from the UN framework for the solution of the Cyprus problem or any thoughts - from wherever they may be - about a "two-state solution" and confederation, that is to say, partition.

A solution of the Cyprus problem on the basis of principles, based on a bi-zonal bi-communal federation, with a single sovereignty, a single citizenship, a single international personality and political equality of the two communities as defined in the relevant UN resolutions, is the only way for Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots to be able to be optimistic about their future and the future of their children; about the future of our common homeland. We should leave behind us the dogmas that state that "Cyprus is a Greek island" or that it is "an extension of Anatolia", as well as the views about supposed "mother countries". We should leave behind the anachronistic regime of guarantor powers over Cyprus, the occupation and division. As Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots - wiser through drawing the lessons from history - we can be masters of our common homeland without guardians.

In a world and in an era of competitions and conflicts, the free and reunited Cyprus will emerge as a model where two communities with a different language, ethnicity, religion and a painful historical legacy will coexist harmoniously within their common homeland and co-manage their common state. Two communities that - as a people and as a homeland - will add to our strengths and multiply our country's dynamics and prospects. Cyprus, one of the most militarized areas of the world, will rid itself of armies, minefields, weapons, barbed wires and checkpoints and will set an example of peace and security in the Eastern Mediterranean. This is not just a vision. It is an immediate strategic goal that serves the interests of the peoples of Cyprus, Greece and Turkey. It serves peace and opens up roads for cooperation which today are unthinkable.

In conclusion, I would like to come back to the overall situation of the Eastern Mediterranean. In one way or another, the fate of the countries of the region is connected and what happens next to us - sooner or later - arrives on our own door step. Issues such as the solution of the Middle East problem with the establishment of an independent Palestinian state on the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital, the end of the bloodshed in Syria, the restoration of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country, the de-nuclearisation of the Mediterranean and the Middle East for which the peace movements of many countries in the region are struggling for are just some of the great challenges our neighborhood faces. These are stakes and goals that if they have a positive outcome can radically change the whole landscape in the Eastern Mediterranean.

With these thoughts in mind I would like to thank you once again for the invitation. I hope that a fruitful and productive debate will subsequently follow.