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EUROPEAN UNION MEMBERSHIP AS AN ALTERNATIVE HORIZON FOR THE TRNC AGAINST “KOSOVOIZATION” AND “TAIWANIZATION”

Two recent public opinion polls conducted in Cyprus give important insights as to how the economic-political future of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) can be shaped in the context of the relations with the European Union (EU). The first poll was carried out by the Public Research and Consultancy Center (KADEM) in collaboration with Symmetron Market Research from the Southern Cyprus on behalf of a civil society initiative called *Cyprus 2015*.² The second poll was again carried out by KADEM on behalf of the TRNC Foreign Ministry with the theme “Cyprus Problem, Information, Attitude and Preferences”. The results of the said poll were featured by Turkish Agency Cyprus (TAK) on March 10, 2011.

One of the striking features of the poll conducted on behalf of the *Cyprus 2015* initiative is related with the solution models Turkish Cypriots prioritize for the solution of the Cyprus problem (see Figure 5):

¹ <http://www.tepav.org.tr/en/ekibimiz/s/1200/Mehmet+Ratip>

² The survey was conducted with a sample composed of 800 Greek Cypriots and 800 Turkish Cypriots via face-to-face interviews between September 5 and 30, 2010. For more information, please see *Cyprus 2015* web site at <http://cyprus2015.org/> (retrieved on 03.03.2011).

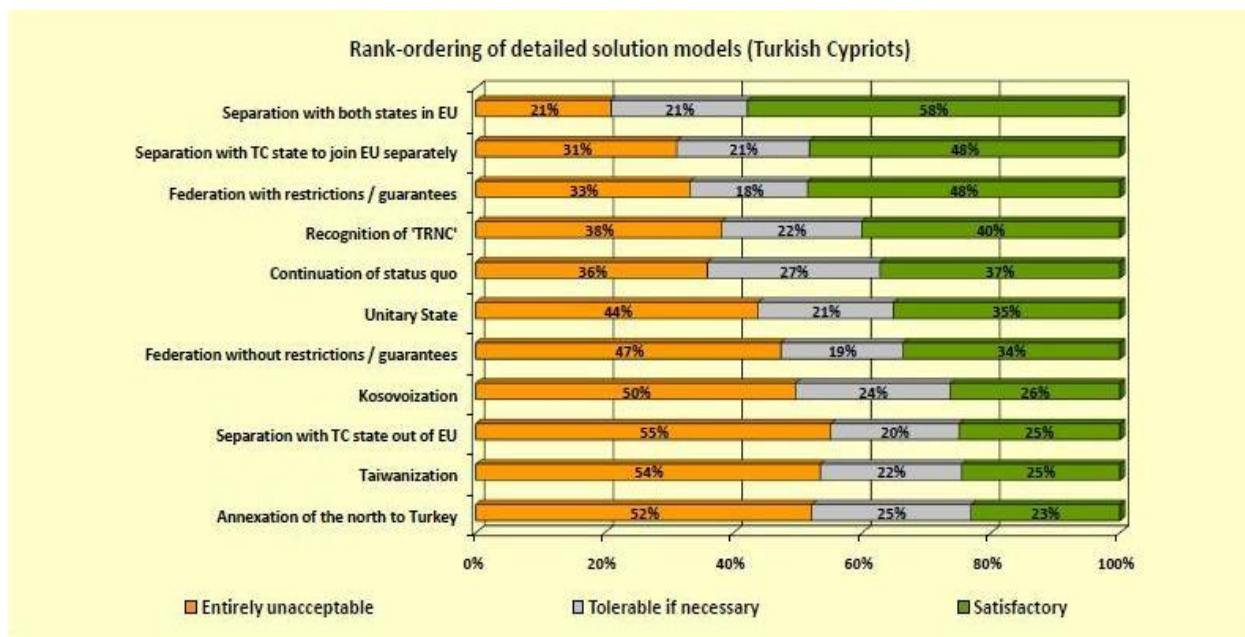


Figure 5 / CYPRUS 2015, September 2010

In the light of the above figure, we can argue that “separation with both states in EU” being the ideal model for Turkish Cypriots is of importance for it puts an emphasis on the EU membership rather than on separation driven by the evaporation of hopes for uniting with Greek Cypriots as frequently highlighted. The emphasis on the EU membership comes to the fore also in the second best option preferred by the Turkish Cypriots (“separation with TC state to join EU separately”). The outstanding point here is that the models deemed to be the ideal solution foresee separation accompanied with EU membership rather than pure separation. This is why the options “recognition of the TRNC”, “continuation of the status quo” and “separation with TC state out of EU” as non-EU scenarios find place in the back seats, at the 4th, 5th, and 9th places, respectively. The results reveal that EU membership accompanied by different options constitutes the top-three ideal models.

What is perhaps more critical is that “Kosovoization” and “Taiwanization” are not deemed to be satisfactory options by a majority of the Turkish Cypriots. Kosovoization defined as “an autonomous Turkish Cypriot region in the north, which will gradually be gaining its independence through direct supervision of the international community” and Taiwanization defined as “an autonomous Turkish Cypriot region in the north, with the ability to trade internationally but no diplomatic recognition” were considered as insufficient measures that hinder them to have a more equal role in the international community and were rejected by the majority of Turkish Cypriots. Therefore, it will not be surprising if any future economic design that carries the indications of Kosovoization and Taiwanization raises doubts among the Turkish Cypriots. Northern Cyprus’s position as a neighbor to the EU (through the member state Republic of Cyprus) certainly has a role in Turkish Cypriots’ setting the EU as the standard. It should be noted that as long as the recognition of the TRNC is delayed on the basis of a broad array of reasons, EU will continue considering the TRNC as a European zone where the suspended EU norms will be adopted gradually, at least in technical terms.

Taking departure from this general outlook, we can conclude that an economic future for the TRNC that will be shaped in line with the EU norms will be deemed satisfactory by Turkish Cypriots. In addition, it is evident that demand for normalization in the light of the EU norms aimed to be realized without being deprived of a separate and autonomous state is of vital importance for Turkish Cypriots independent of a possible solution that foresees a federal partnership with Greek Cypriots. It is now an unavoidable necessity for Turkish Cypriots to experience a productive state with fiscal autonomy and discipline under any future scenario. Positive expectations among Turkish Cypriots about the EU norms are embedded in the desire for a productive and efficient state mechanism.

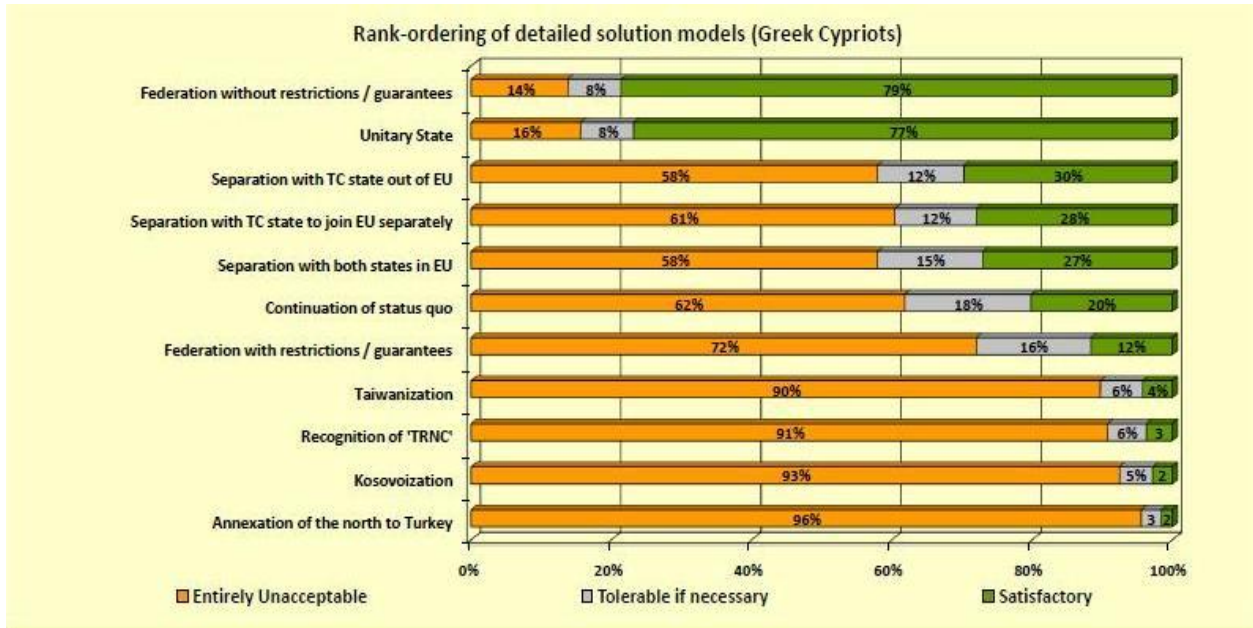


Figure 6 / CYPRUS 2015, September 2010

Greek Cypriot's preferences about solution models are also highly interesting (see Figure 6). “Federation without restrictions/guarantees” and “unitary state” models were seen satisfactory by 79% and 77%, respectively, followed by separation models that will regulate Turkish Cypriots' relations with the EU. The models “Separation with the TC state out of the EU”, “Separation with TC state to join EU separately” and “Separation with both states in EU” were seen satisfactory respectively by 30%, 28% and 27% of Greek Cypriots. It is important to note that all of the three options stated above are considered to be more satisfactory than the option “continuation of status quo” (20% satisfactory) by Greek Cypriots. Furthermore, similar to Turkish Cypriots, a relatively smaller proportion of Greek Cypriots consider Kosovoization and Taiwanization to be satisfactory options, indicating that the issue should not be moved out of the EU framework. The third solution model “Separation with the TC state out of the EU” is deemed entirely unacceptable by 58% of Greek Cypriots (see Figure 7).

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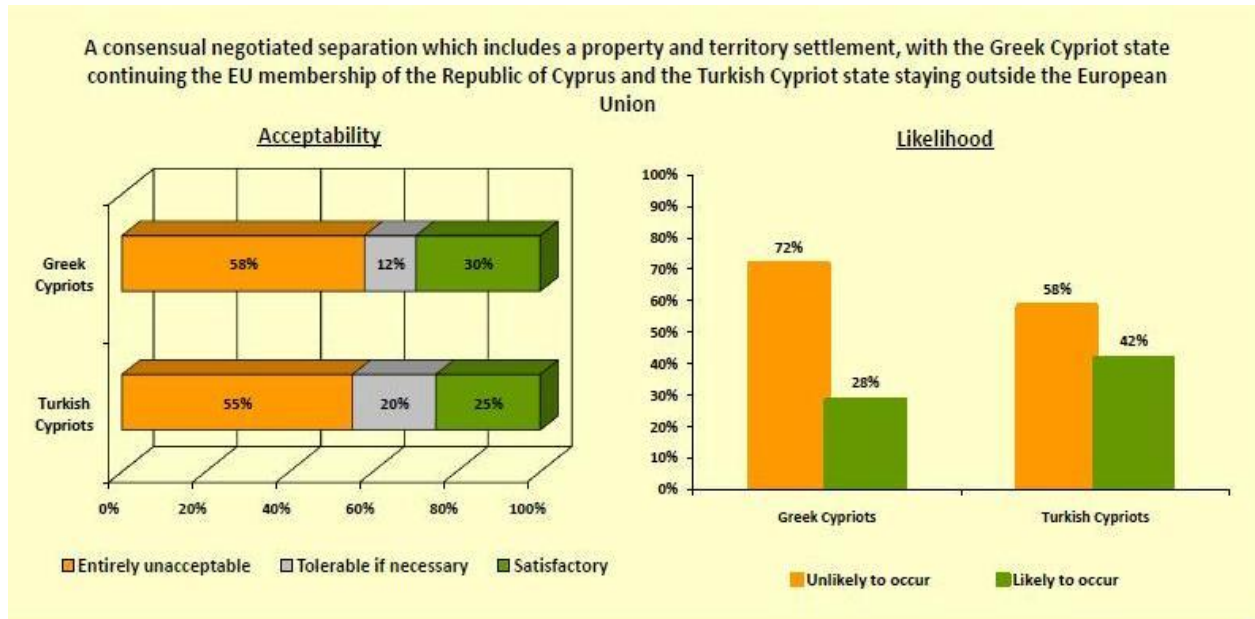


Figure 7 / CYPRUS 2015, September 2010

The detailed formulization of this option is as follows: “A consensual negotiated separation which includes a property and territory settlement, with the Greek Cypriot state continuing the EU membership of the Republic of Cyprus and the Turkish Cypriot state staying outside the European Union.” Survey results reveal that this option was considered to be “unlikely to occur” by a higher majority of Greek Cypriots (72%) than Turkish Cypriots (58%). In this context, one can claim that Greek Cypriots believe that a framework of settlement that is more congruent with their priority solution preferences based on federative or unitary state models can be reconciled with Northern Cypriots within the EU framework. Therefore, parties on the island might prefer to protect the EU framework driven with the hope to strengthen their hands and demands. Even if the ideal expectations about the EU are not entirely met for any of the two parties due to certain disappointments, Greek Cypriots might hope to use their advantageous position of already being a member state before the Turkish Cypriots who hold the EU perspective whereas Northern Cypriots might embrace the EU path with the aim to enable international interaction as a more realistic option than the other non-EU scenarios. It is pleasing to see the hint that the island started to regulate the relations with the EU through a perspective of strategic and rational realism rather than through misinformation and unrealistic ideals. These insights might guide the process to grounds on which more pragmatic and reasonable initiatives to a solution can be based.

The results of the second poll mentioned above on the European Union also validate the above findings. Announcing the results of the survey conducted by KADEM with a press meeting, TRNC Foreign Minister Hüseyin Özgürgün highlighted the following issues with respect to the attitude towards the EU:

“According to the survey results, large majority of our people think that harmonization with the EU legislation would be ‘good’ or ‘neither good nor bad’. Only small minority thinks that harmonization will not bring positive conclusions. Majority believes that

becoming a member to the EU will create positive effects in terms of transportation, economy and environment and this opinion strengthens among the young population. However, vast majority of the Turkish Cypriots assess many decisions and implementations of the EU to be negative. 69% of the population has a negative view of EU's attitude towards the elimination of isolation, 68% of the general attitude of the EU towards the Cyprus problem, 70% of the attitude towards the Direct Trade Regulation and 72% of the decisions of the EU institutions about property. In short, large majority of our people are in favor of EU membership and being part of Europe. However this questionnaire also verifies that Turkish Cypriot people's disappointment, anxiety and distrust towards the EU's implementations are increasing.”³

As Foreign Minister Mr. Özgürgün also emphasized, positive expectations about the EU are strikingly prevalent particularly among the young population. Even the EU implementations related to the Cyprus problem about which the majority has a negative view could not prevent EU norms from being considered as a horizon for normalization by the Northern Cypriots. Such results which seem to be contradictory at first glance in fact highlight that there exists (independent of the current course of the efforts for settlement in Cyprus) a social base in Northern Cyprus for designing an economic-political future based on the EU norms in response to major problems such as inefficient state, unsustainable economy, and social-environmental challenges.

³ <<http://www.turkajansikibris.net/index.php/lang/tr/cat/249/news/28666>> (Retrieved on 15.03.2011).