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EVALUATION NOTE

ARE THE RECENT EUROPEAN COUNCIL DECISIONS ON TÜRKİYE HYPOCRITICAL?

On the 17th of April 2024, the European Council convened. Some circles in Turkey expected that the 'Joint Communication of the High Representative and Commission on the state of play of EU-Türkiye political, economic and trade relations' that was published at the end of November would be finally addressed and some concrete steps would be put across by the heads of states and governments. Unfortunately, this turned out not to be the case. The leaders tasked the Committee of Permanent Representatives (COREPER)² "to advance work on the recommendations of the Joint Communication in line with previous European Council conclusions and in a phased, proportionate and reversible manner, subject to additional guidance from the European Council".

Furthermore, the wording of the Presidency conclusions suggested that resumption of and progress in the Cyprus settlement talks have become the precondition of enhancing co-operation with Türkiye.

Some of my Turkish colleagues who are experienced experts in and supporters of Türkiye-EU relations blamed the European Council conclusions for lacking a strategic view and for using euphemisms and expressing nonchalance. In turn, some foreign experts stated that these conclusions were proof perfect that a more democratic and European Türkiye is the major challenge for many EU leaders who prefer a transactional relationship with the country. I agree with these evaluations, yet my main concern is the hypocrisy I sense in the Conclusions. Here is why:

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

² Committee made up of the permanent delegates -ambassadors of the member states to the EU)

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- **Tasking COREPER to work on the Joint Communication**

Asking the COREPER to advance work on the proposals of the aforementioned Joint Communication sounds really strange since “*Coreper coordinates and prepares the work of all meetings of the Council and attempts to find, at its level, an agreement which will be subsequently submitted for adoption by the Council*”³.. hence COREPER should have already worked on the aforementioned Joint Communication.

It has been almost four and a half months since the Communication was published and no technical/political work has been conducted on it before it has been submitted to the European Council. We are asked to believe that while preparing and coordinating the Council’s agenda COREPER has not worked on the Joint Communication. Is this really the case? It is truly hard to believe.

- **Resumption of and progress in Cyprus settlement talks as precondition for enhancing Türkiye-EU relations**

The Cyprus Problem has been on the international agenda for almost six decades but unfortunately international support and encouragement for the parties to take steps towards a settlement have remained very limited until now. The main reason is the relative calm on the island that has provided kind of a comfort zone for the international community.

The EU is no exception. It has been an observer and an outsider to the conflict. However, the EU is not just a part of international community in this case. Cyprus is a member state, and the island is a part of the EU territory according to international law. Hence not searching for a solution to the conflict seriously stains the “peace project” nature of the EU.

With all due respect to the “solidarity principle” (*which has not been respected during the refugee crises*) the EU could have come up with constructive proposals behind closed doors. At the very least it could have financed technical (energy security, fight against climate change etc.) projects given the interdependence between the parties that share the island.

On the contrary the EU has first made a strategic mistake by accepting Cyprus as a member without a settlement, hence removing all the motives for the Greek Cypriots to support a solution to the conflict. Furthermore, after the most comprehensive settlement plan, i.e the Annan Plan was overwhelmingly rejected by the Greek Cypriots, the EU promised to end the isolation of Turkish Cypriots but it could not initiate direct trade with them because of political pressure coming from Greek Cypriots⁴ .

The second comprehensive effort for a solution was the Crans Montana process which unfortunately failed in 2017. Even pro-solution Greek Cypriots blamed the then Cyprus president Nicos Anastasiades for the failure. He rejected political equality because his priority

³ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/EN/legal-content/glossary/coreper.html>

⁴ On 21 April 2010, the Cypriot Foreign Minister Markos KYPRIANU declared that that “We will use all the institutional and political procedures we have at our disposal, and even if the ...direct trade ...regulation is promoted in the end, we will appeal to the Court of the European Communities” in “Nicosia ready to challenge TRNC direct trade regulation”, by Joanna Sopinska , EUROPOLITICS, 22 April 2010.

was securing a second term as president. You can read in some Greek Cypriot sources that Türkiye had made significant concessions on guarantees, troop withdrawal and territory.⁵ Unfortunately, Mr. Anastasiades' stance provided the rulers of Türkiye with a strong argument in favour of a two-state solution.

Shockingly, the EU puts all the blame on Türkiye and Turkish Cypriots disregarding the fact that it was the Greek Cypriots who failed two important settlement efforts; the Annan Plan and the Crans Montana process. Furthermore, EU is increasingly complicit in the squeezing of Turkish Cypriots between Greek Cyprus and Türkiye. Remaining on a limbo North Cyprus becomes a center of money laundering and organized crime as the Russians who used to do these things in the South had to leave Greek Cyprus after the EU acquis was finally fully implemented there. The United States of America is concerned about this development but not the EU although legally it is its own territory. Are these things being discussed in the EU if and when the Cyprus settlement is on the agenda over there?

The EU has not paid any attention to first Anastasiades' and then Nikos Christodoulides' proposals for confidence building measures⁶ to enable the implementation of the additional protocol (Türkiye opening its ports and airports to Cyprus). These proposals were very similar to those proposed by Türkiye in 2006 (not surprisingly) that went unnoticed by the EU. Even Mr. Christodoulides complained about the EU's aloofness to the problem.

The best or most equitable if imperfect solution for the Cyprus conflict is a bi-zonal, bi-communal federation based on UN parameters. However, if ever the talks start again, political equality which is another UN parameter should be respected, talks should have a calendar and Turkish Cypriots should know what would happen to them if Greek Cypriots again reject political equality. In such a case, no legitimate cause could be invoked to justify the isolations imposed on Turkish Cypriots.

Without taking consideration of any of these points, the EU puts all the blame on Türkiye and Turkish Cypriots for the deadlock in the island and now the solution to the Cyprus problem is turned into the precondition for co-operation with Turkey.

When Turkey became a candidate back in 1999, many commentators claimed or perhaps wishfully expressed that hypocrisy and double talk were over. Depending on all the considerations above it is so sad to see that indeed they are not.

⁵ Cyprus Mail, "Our View: It was Anastasiades, not the UN who blew chance for a solution", 24 September 2022
Leontios Ierodiakonou, "Bane of Cyprus solution: too much power in one man", Cyprus Mail, 24 March 2024

⁶ Anastasiades' confidence-building proposals envisage the handing over of the fenced area of Varosha to the UN, opening of Tymbou (Ercan) airport to direct flights under the UN and the opening of Famagusta port to foreign trade, under EU supervision. With direct flights and lifting of the trade embargo the isolation of the Turkish would end. In exchange he had asked for the implementation for the additional Ankara protocol, opening Turkey's ports to Cyprus-flagged ships and allowing Cyprus planes into Turkish airspace.