

What Has Gone Wrong with the EU's Structural Foreign Policy towards the Turkish Cypriot Community?

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The Cyprus conflict has consequences not only for the Cypriots but also for the international community. After the Annan Plan, the EU has become involved in the resolution of this conflict. Endeavouring to encourage Turkey and Turkish Cypriots to produce a quick solution, the EU advocated that the Cyprus problem should not hinder the accession of the Republic of Cyprus into the EU. However, in 2004 75.83% of Greek Cypriot community voted against the Annan Plan. Even if Turkish Cypriots supported the Annan Plan (64.90%), the Republic of Cyprus entered the EU representing the whole island. The European Commission reacted by agreeing to 'reward' Turkish Cypriot community's 'yes' by a financial assistance package, easing trade between the two sides, lifting the isolations on Turkish Cypriots, and helping the Cypriots to solve the conflict. However, it has faced major difficulties in implementing these policies.

Developments in EU's policies in Northern Cyprus

The Green Line separates the island into two, where northern side of the line is referred as being 'non-government controlled areas'. The Green Line Regulation of 2004 on movement of persons and goods across the line has aimed to foster Turkish Cypriot trade and encourage reunification. Although the regulation provides a legal framework for Cypriots crossing the line, it brought with it problems of illegal migration from the northern side to the southern side of the island. As per European Commission reports, the amount of intra-trade has remained marginal due to the refusal of

Greek Cypriots to buy Turkish Cypriot products. Intra-trade continues to decrease along with crossings. Isolations imposed on Turkish Cypriots cover the restrictions towards direct trade, direct travel links, and participation in international social and cultural events such as international sport events and ERASMUS program. Lifting the isolations would show that the EU is earnest in its claim for supporting a federal partnership between Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots. Given that Turkish Cypriots showed clear support for reunification in 2004, the EU should help them improve their capacity for handling possible reunification as well as European integration. The veto of the Republic of Cyprus in the Council of Ministers however prevented the EU to implement its 2004 promise of lifting the isolations until December 2009. After the Lisbon Treaty came into force and the issue of direct trade was considered eligible for discussions under the co-decision procedure, the EU, as a result of effective Greek Cypriot lobbying, discussed the issue in the Legal Affairs Council of the European Parliament and decided that it could not be treated as any other trade deal with a third country. Thus, direct trade regulation was once again put on hold.

Turkish Cypriots still suffer from a lack of contact with the outside world, including the EU. One of the most evident institutional consequences of the status quo is that even though the Turkish Cypriots are citizens of the Republic of Cyprus, all six members of the European Parliament from Cyprus are Greek Cypriots and Turkish, which is an official language of the Republic of Cyprus, is not an official language of the EU. To assure fair representation of EU citizens in EU institutions, the Republic

of Cyprus should consider proposing Turkish as an official EU language. Even if the EU has not mentioned the issue during accession negotiations, it can include the language issue within its efforts of lifting the isolations on Turkish Cypriots.

At first, there were restrictions to the financial aid program of the EU as the former president Papadopoulos sued the EU with six different cases in order to block aid to the Turkish Cypriot community. However, four failed cases in the European Court of Justice became an impetus for succeeding president Christofias to withdraw the remaining two cases from the Court. The EU created a budget of EUR 259 million for the Turkish Cypriot community to be spent on various projects such as infrastructure development, civil society capacity building, and scholarship program. The entire amount could not be spent due to the initial Greek Cypriot obstruction. Nevertheless, despite various obstacles for successful implementation, a number of important and beneficial projects mentioned in Turkish Cypriot media have improved Turkish Cypriots' trust in the EU.

Since the Republic of Cyprus is a full member of the EU, the EU is reluctant to pressure the Republic of Cyprus for a solution. Moreover, there is also a lack of common stance on the Cypriot issue. Whereas members like the UK and Sweden emerge as fairly supportive of Turkish Cypriots, France and Germany openly side with Greek Cypriot administration. Thus, the EU's support for the negotiations has most of the time remained only with rhetoric.

Consequences of Failed Policies

Although Turkish Cypriots are EU citizens, Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus is a de facto state that is not part of the EU but is highly influenced by the EU. Hence, the policy of the EU towards the Turkish Cypriot community provides an example of the EU's structural foreign policy. In this special case, the EU attempts to change and create various structures in the Turkish Cypriot community to prepare the Turkish Cypriots for full membership under a unified country by strengthening civil society, boosting democratization, liberalization, and economic well being. Furthermore, it intends to contribute to elimination of economic disparities that exist between the two communities.

However, the EU's structural foreign policy towards Turkish Cypriots does not emerge as a success story. The EU has not been effective when it comes to supporting negotiations for a solution. The Green Line Regulation has only had a trivial effect. The state of isolations on Turkish Cypriots has only changed minimally. The financial aid regulation on the other hand has somewhat succeeded in developing the northern part of the island and influencing the Turkish Cypriots' attitudes towards the EU. In overall though, promises that could not be kept and the slow pace of progress may have caused Turkish Cypriots to lose faith in Europe. This may be one of the reasons why in the last elections Turkish Cypriots shifted back to the ethnocentric, nationalist and euro-skeptical National Unity Party (Ulusal Birlik Partisi).

Figure 1 – Trust in the European Union in Percentage (Eurobarometer)

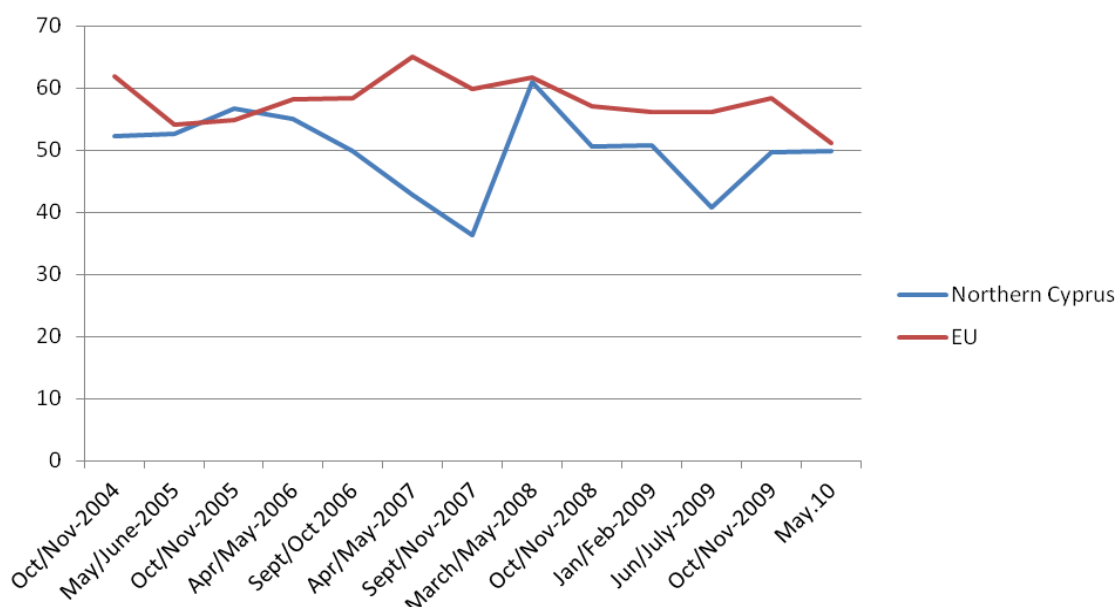


Figure 1 illustrating the Turkish Cypriots' trust in the EU clearly shows a matter of concern for the success of the EU's structural foreign policy towards Turkish Cypriots. Apart from the early 2008 datum, Turkish Cypriots' trust in the EU shows a lower average than that of the EU average and mainly declining trends since late 2005.

The Way Forward

Turkish Cypriots are citizens of the EU as individuals even if the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus is not recognized by the EU and the European laws are not applied in the northern part of the island. Any democratic polity acquires its legitimacy from its citizens. If

the EU desires to gain Turkish Cypriots' trust, it needs to be proactive with the goal of implementing the direct trade regulation, opening the Ercan airport to international flights, and lifting cultural and sport embargoes on Turkish Cypriots. The possibility of Turkish becoming an official language of the EU should also be considered by negotiating this matter with the current President Christofias who is known to be positive towards Turkish Cypriots compared with many other Greek Cypriot politicians. Finally, the European Commission should make intensive and objective efforts towards finding a solution to the Cyprus problem to enhance the representation of Turkish Cypriots in EU institutions.